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HORROR IN CLASSICAL ANTIQUITY AND BEYOND

BODY, AFFECT, CONCEPTS

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Edited by George Kazantzidis and Chiara Thumiger

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CONTENTS

List of Illustrations vii
List of Contributors viii
Acknowledgements ix

Introduction: Embodied Experience, Literary Representations and Human Knowledge: Horror in Graeco-Roman Antiquity and Its Legacy
George Kazantzidis and Chiara Thumiger 1

1 **Horror Now and Horror Then: Horror's Long Reach from Antiquity to Modernity and Back Again**
Kathleen Cruz 27

2 **Horror in the *Odyssey*: A Few Notes on Leodes' Beheading (22.326–9)**
Giulia Maria Chesi 47

3 **The Visceral Thrills of Tragedy: Flesh, Blood and Guts *Off* and *On* the Tragic Stage**
Evina Sistakou 59

4 **The Horrific Body in Sophocles**
Glenn W. Most 75

5 **Naming the Monster: Forensic Horror and Collective Trauma in Cicero's *Pro Roscio***
Sophia Häberle 93

6 **Fearful Laughter: Bodily Horror in Roman Sexual Humour**
Jesse Weiner 115

7 ***Cruor in flores mutabitur*: Horrific Hybridizations in the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid**
Aline Estèves 129

8 **Landscapes and Bodies of Horror in Seneca's *Thyestes***
Simona Martorana 143

9 **The Vocabulary of Homicidal Horror in Libanius' *Against a Murderer***
Debbie Felton 161

10 **At the Borders of Horror and Science: The Social Contexts of Roman Dissection**
Claire Bubb 175

11 Overcoming Horror: 'Numbness' and Medical Agents – Some Thoughts on Medical Horror in Antiquity and Today
Lutz Alexander Graumann 189

12 Recipes for Horror in Graeco-Roman Magic and Medicine
Sean Coughlin 215

13 Dissecting the Gothic: Horror and the Romantic Body in Sheridan Le Fanu's *In a Glass Darkly*
Arden Hegele 247

Bibliography 259
Index locorum 291
Index rerum et nominum 295

ILLUSTRATIONS

2.1 Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Firenze, Inv. Nr. 4209, detail 50
2.2 National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Inv. Nr. 1643.a-b-D4, Side A 51
4.1 Theatrical masks of Tragedy and Comedy of the second century CE from the Thermae Decianae at Rome (Palazzo Nuovo, Capitoline Museums, Rome) 79
4.2 'Horror and Agony. Copied from a photograph by Dr. Duchenne', from Charles Darwin, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (London 1872), p. 306 80
4.3 Brauron, marble slab with the recall of Philoctetes, before mid-second century 85
4.4 Gerard Francksz van der Kuijl, *Philoctetes on Lemnos* (1647) 85
4.5 James Barry, *Philoctetes on the Island of Lemnos* (1770) 86
4.6 Jean Germain Drouais, *Philoctetes* (1788) 87
4.7 Guillaume Guillon-Lethière, *Philoctetes* (1798) 88
4.8 Nicolai Abildgaard, *The Wounded Philoctetes* (1775) 89
11.1 Plastic model of a human skull; L. A. Graumann (photograph: author) 190
11.2 Émile Signol (1804–92), *Portrait of Hector Berlioz* (1832), now in Villa Medici, Rome; Public domain (WikiCommons) 191
11.3–5 Daily radiological round, Department of General Surgery, University Hospital Gießen; L. A. Graumann (photographs: author; identities obscured) 199
11.6–9 Clinical images of severe ingrown toenails: left (6), right big toe (7), partially excised nail plate (8), severe bilateral ingrown toenails (9); L. A. Graumann (photographs: author) 201
12.1 Constituents of iron-gall ink 233
12.2 Experiment on the effects of blood and iron (ii) sulphate on a decoction of oak gall 235
12.3 Constituents of myrrh inks 236
12.4 Myrrh and blood inks before agitation 237

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INTRODUCTION: EMBODIED EXPERIENCE, LITERARY REPRESENTATIONS AND HUMAN KNOWLEDGE: HORROR IN GRAECO-ROMAN ANTIQUITY AND ITS LEGACY

George Kazantzidis and Chiara Thumiger

Preliminary observations

The present volume is not interested in the beginnings of horror as a genre.[1] For one thing, as one of our contributors, Kathleen Cruz, points out, in a chapter entitled 'Horror Now and Horror Then: Horror's Long Reach from Antiquity to Modernity and Back Again': 'The ancient Mediterranean does not have a collection of interconnected texts associated with horror (or *horror*) in the way many modern societies do – and horror is not included in ancient taxonomies of genre – and so a firm genre theory closes off many profitable avenues of investigation.' In the same spirit, Debbie Felton reminds us that 'Genre in antiquity was based on literary conventions, not content; hence epic poetry, lyric poetry, tragedy, comedy, history, and so on'. Accordingly, 'despite the presence of horrific elements such as the hostile monsters, bloody violence, gory mutilations, and gruesome deaths usually associated with negative emotions, "horror" and its subset "body horror" were not recognized genres of literature in the ancient world' – nor even, we may add, recognized motifs or themes in ancient texts.[2]

Since genre does not provide a solid operating mode in our case, what we wish to do instead is focus on the 'grammar', so to speak, of the emotion in question, as we understand it today, and work our way back to a variety of texts and of literary and cultural traditions which present us with images, ideas and 'scripts'[3] that can be meaningfully discussed as precedents of the deeply unsettling, visceral, uncanny, and ultimately paralysing experience which we refer to as 'horror'. Once we establish a working account and description of such grammar, we will then proceed to situate it within the context of wider 'knowledge systems'. With 'knowledge systems' we refer both to scientific inquiries and paradigms found in the ancient world, but also to the sets of rules and norms regulated by social, religious and political conventions that hold our world together, and whose sudden, abrupt transgression engenders chaos and terror.

We are firmly aware that this methodology too is not without its risks of anachronism; it is then best and safest to begin by laying out, first of all, some of the seminal parameters of modern horror, and proceed to test if, and how, they can be applied as analytical tools to our project.

We can sum up these parameters as follows:

(a) Horror is both an affective and a mental/cognitive category. It is an *affect* insofar as it involves a number of intensely felt emotions (emotions which, in our modern vocabulary, are usually conceptualized as intensified forms of 'fear'; see point (b) below), and has an ability to influence our psyche in a way that is deeply linked to the body. On the other hand, it is also an agonizing attempt to grasp and process the object and source of horror *mentally*. In fact, a great deal of the affective script of horror is energized and thus defined by the very fact that we are not in the position to fully understand what it is exactly that we see (for horror, in sensorial terms, belongs mainly to sight). In this sense, horror thrives in symbiosis with mental confusion.

In *Being and Time*, Martin Heidegger makes the following observations about 'dread':

> Dread [*Grauen*] is dread of the indefinite as that which is impatient of definition. In dread, as we say, 'one feels something uncanny [*unheimlich*]'. What is this 'something' and this 'one'? We are unable to say what gives 'one' that uncanny feeling. 'One just feels it generally … Dread reveals nothing. In dread we are suspended, or more exactly dread holds us in suspense by causing the totality of that which is to elude us … Dread strikes us dumb. In the uncanniness of dread we often try to break the silence by random words, but this only proves the presence of nothing.*[4]

What Heidegger claims at this point about the mental confusion that permeates the experience of 'dread'[5] applies also in the case of 'horror'.[6] In fact, so deep and intense is the mental disorientation that accompanies horror that the subject may often end up doubting their own sanity. This explains, for instance, why horror and madness are perceived as intrinsically linked to each other,[7] madness being the fullest expression of the subversion or denial of order altogether from the point of view of the subject.[8] It could be said that horror essentially arises when our established beliefs and notions about what counts as 'real' and 'not-real', or 'un-real', are shaken.

(b) As far as its affective (i.e. related to human emotions and feelings) side is concerned, horror is a multifaceted concept. On the one hand, we tend to conceive of horror as an *intensified* form of fear. In English, words such as 'terror' and 'dread' are usually meant to convey something that exceeds fear in terms of degree – and 'horror' falls precisely into this category. In ancient Greek and Latin, correspondingly, there are a variety of terms which appear to indicate different shades, degrees of experience, and concreteness of fear. So, for instance, in ancient Greek we have the word φόβος, but we also have δεῖμα, φρίκη and so on. In Latin, the variety is even greater: *timor* does not stand by itself but absorbs further meaning in association with, and in differential relation to, terms such as *metus, pavor, terror* and *horror*.[9] Whenever and wherever they are used, these terms – be they Greek or Latin – require meticulous contextualization and delicate treatment. Ever since Robert Kaster proposed that we should be reading emotions in terms of the narrative processes or 'scripts' that underlie them, the quest for exact lexical equivalents that would instantaneously bridge the gap between 'modern' and 'ancient' anger, fear, hatred, love, disgust and so on has been abandoned for good.[10] Following this lead, we submit that modern horror cannot be found to correspond exactly with one of the Greek and Latin 'fear'-terms mentioned above. Still, we believe that classical antiquity knew of several emotional states which are closely akin to fear and are quite often defined as extreme, hyperbolic forms of it. What is more, in some cases we even find specific types of emotions which combine the element of intensified fear with the idea of mental confusion that was mentioned in point (a) above. So, for example, in a treatise entitled *De passionibus*, ps.-Andronicus of Rhodes (first century BCE) divides φόβος into thirteen different subcategories, and among them, as type no. 5, he identifies *ekplēxis* in the following terms:

> Ἔκπληξις δὲ φόβος ἕνεκα ἀσυνήθους φαντασίας δεινοῦ.
>
> *ekplēxis* is fear caused by the mental representation (*phantasia*) of something unfamiliar and awful

Phantasia stands for any kind of mental representation through which we engage with the world around us and process information. What makes this particular *phantasia* especially unsettling is not so much the fact that it is 'terrifying' (*deinos*) as that it is unfamiliar, 'unusual' (*asunêthos*) – in the sense that it removes us, and violently so, from the comfort zone that we inhabit in the form of everyday reality.

But then again, *ekplēxis* (understood already by Aristotle as a kind of σφοδρός φόβος)[11] is not quite the same as what we mean by 'horror' today. The conceptual affinities between the two are definitely present, but they do not meet the conditions for a semantic identification. Nor is such 'identification' what we look for in this volume. As we mentioned above, horror, when conceived as an affect, is a multilayered category – one that cannot be understood only in connection with fear. Modern theorists insist in fact that for horror to arise we also need another deeply embodied emotion, namely disgust. As Noël Carroll (1990: 22) points out in his important study *The Philosophy of Horror*:

> A character's affective reaction to the monstrous in horror stories is not merely a matter of fear, i.e., of being frightened by something that threatens danger. Rather, threat is compounded with revulsion, nausea, and disgust. And this corresponds as well with the tendency in horror novels and stories to describe monsters in terms of and to associate them with filth, decay, deterioration, slime and so on. The monster in horror fiction, that is, is not only lethal but – and this is of utmost significance – also disgusting.*

The connection between horror and disgust is also prevalent in Stephen King's following categorization:

> Terror is the sound of the old man's continuing pulsebeat in 'The Tell-Tale Heart' – a quick sound, 'like a watch wrapped in cotton'. Horror is the amorphous but very physical 'thing' in Joseph Payne Brennan's wonderful novella 'Slime' as it enfolds itself over the body of a screaming dog. But there is a third level – that of revulsion. This seems to be where the 'chest-burster' from *Alien* fits.*[12]

Interestingly, for King, 'revulsion' is one step beyond and above 'horror' – which, in its turn, is conceived as a less refined and more physical experience when compared to the more subtly psychological category of 'terror'. However this might be, both Carroll's and King's observations help to show that the emotion of horror is intrinsically linked to that of disgust: we fear e.g. a thing or a person when we realize that this thing or person poses a threat to our well-being. But to become horrified by them we also need to deem them appalling and disgusting.

(c) Many things can be disgusting but not all of them are horrifying. The kind of disgust that usually comes in the same package with horror typically concerns monsters and mixed hybrids that defy established ontological categories and blur the limits between e.g. human and animal, male and female, etc. As Jesse Weiner illustrates in his chapter, entitled 'Fearful Laughter: Bodily Horror in Roman Sexual Humour', the comedic, the gross and the terrifying often converge, in ancient Roman imagination, with reference to the figure of *cinaedus* – that weird creature which moves across the borders of deviant masculinity, effeminacy, bestiality and deformity.[13] As Weiner shows, disgust is prevalent in these cases, but so is laughter. 'Like horror', as the author observes, 'Roman sexual humour depends … upon transgressive violation of physical norms and social taboos' and proceeds then to show how this specific type of humour 'depends upon responses of disgust and revulsion to the physical bodies – both biological and stylized – of these figures, as well as upon terror of the prospect of domination and violation by these same bodies'. Horror, as was stressed in point (b) above, is a complex category, and it would be a mistake to associate it only with fear and its cognates. Weiner's chapter shows well how laughter – and an aggressive kind of exhilaration – also belong to its script.

Sexuality is also of the essence here. A strong element of socio-political order and self-definition within human societies (and surely in the ancient Greek and Roman ones) is sex and all that comes with it: sex both as anatomical and bodily differentiation into male and female; as sexual activity and reproductive functionality; and as a 'perturbing element' – to use Bernini's expression.*[14] Ancient societies did not condemn what one might call sexual divergence such as cross-dressing or sexual non-conformity (intersexual bodies, hermaphroditism) as inherently negative and disruptive.[15] At the same time, however, they remained alert to the possible horrific turns that sex and sexuality could take: Pentheus' death at the hands of the sexually unrestrained Maenads; Hippolytus' miserable end at the mercy of Aphrodite; the tragic myth of Narcissus – a strong statement of the ultimate impossibility to reach sexual satisfaction; the intrinsic dialectics between desire and death in several classical myths (Orpheus and Eurydice, Hades and Persephone); most of all, the insistence on kidnapping and rape as manifestations, almost as a kind of symbolic language, of sexuality –these are only some of the many angles which indicate that sex, for the ancients, was contingent on horror, and vice versa. Sexual deviance and the 'queer'[16] have been read and analysed systematically over the past decades in feminist, political and social-historical contexts.[17] We submit that these categories can also be examined as shedding light on scripts of ancient horror specifically.[18] Jesse Weiner's chapter, with its emphasis on the queer – at once laughable but also profoundly horrifying – bodies of the *cinaedi* is a step in this direction.

But just as horror can be elicited by weird-looking and appalling bodies, in the same way it leaves a distinctive imprint on the body of the horrified subject. In points (a) and (b) above attention was drawn to the affective and mental facets of horror. But horror remains at the same time an essentially visceral emotion. Again, it is worth pondering at this point on the fact that the verb *horreo* in Latin refers – as Glenn Most reminds us in his contribution to this volume ('The Horrific Body in Sophocles') – 'to the hair standing on end, and thence to shuddering or shivering, as a physical response to cold, revulsion, or some other factor'. A similar thing can be said about *phrikē* – a word that occurs in contexts which mean to convey not just 'fear' but fear in its most shattering and excessive forms. It is not a coincidence that the word originally means 'shivering' (as, for example, the shivering caused by fever). Accordingly, this bodily aspect of *phrikē* is never really abandoned – in whatever contexts we find the word. As Douglas Cairns points out in a 2015 essay entitled 'The Horror and the Pity: *Phrikē* as a Tragic Emotion', in the context of a discussion of Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannus* 1297–1306:

> Oedipus' physical appearance makes a difference: The sight of the horrible mutilation that he has inflicted upon himself (represented in the new mask that the actor will have put on before reemerging from the stage-building) elicits a new and more physical response, one that they call *phrikē*, shivering or shuddering . . . This is a response with a strong perceptual element; it is, above all, the sight of Oedipus in his present condition that triggers it. It is a spontaneous and instinctive reaction; but it is not merely a simple reflex, because its ideational content includes the Chorus' attempt to encompass the sheer magnitude of Oedipus' suffering, together with whatever superhuman or supernatural forces may have caused it. These sensory and cognitive aspects, however essential though they may be for the specification of the emotion in these particular circumstances, do not suffice to make *phrikē* what it is – for *phrikē* is fundamentally a physical experience, the experience of a body that shivers and shudders.*

Much of what is said at this point about *phrikē* applies also to how we understand the mechanics of horror today. Regardless of the exact object or situation that elicits it, horror is inconceivable without direct reference to its bodily essentials: freezing, turning pale, trembling and shaking, falling to the ground, jumping and screaming – all these elements turn horror into something that is distinctly recognizable. In this sense, it is worth stressing that while fear can be experienced and processed on a purely mental level, horror takes its toll on both the mind and the body. To put it otherwise: whereas one can hide their fear, horror cannot remain hidden – and this because it shows in the body.

(d) When you see something horrifying you either start screaming or you stand speechless. Horror causes serious disruption in our innate capacity as humans to produce articulate speech. And precisely because horror renders one inarticulate, its source is often hard to put into words. In modern horror fiction, horror is typically evoked on the condition that it should remain indescribable; the terrifying event is usually too frightening to conceive and describe. In H. P. Lovecraft's work, for example, what makes a scene or a creature horrific is precisely the fact that they are never fully disclosed to us, since the medium of language fails to capture the real extent of their monstrosity; in this conceptual landscape, dread has no face. As Maurice Lévy points out, the absolute criterion for the weird and the horrific is 'the subtle and progressive intrusion of the Invisible, of the Inconceivable, into our familiar world, an intrusion that should be more suggested than described, by a fine, transparent system of adequate signs and clues … Horror thrives on the undefined.'*[19]

It is true that we tend to associate horror with things that we *see*. But horror can be equally present and intense when something is insinuated. Take, for example, the case of *monstrum* in Latin. The word can describe a 'monster' but it can also stand for a 'prodigy', a 'sign' that is sent by the gods.[20] And while in the first case horror is naturally evoked at the moment when we actually encounter the monster and we become terrified by its frightening looks, in the second case the unnerving feeling that cripples us with fear and duress is essentially related to the fact that we do not quite know how to interpret the sign, and thus feel suspended and vulnerable to all kinds of catastrophic outcomes and possibilities.

Let us elaborate on this point a bit further. Horror, as we just pointed out, may either emerge from something that is definitively present, in all its sheer monstrosity and appalling details, or, alternatively, under circumstances of what Lévy calls the 'invisible' and the 'undefined'. There are numerous examples that one could adduce for the first type; among them, Plutarch's description of the Carian man's death at the hands of Artaxerxes' mother, Parysatis, stands as a good candidate (*Artaxerxes* 14.5):

> When the king heard of this, he was vehemently angry and gave orders that the man should be beheaded (τὴν κεφαλὴν ἐκέλευσεν ἀποτεμεῖν 5). Whereupon the king's mother, who was present, said to him: 'O King, do not let this accursed Carian off so easily, but leave him to me, and he shall receive the fitting reward for his daring words.' So the king consigned the man to Parysatis, who ordered the executioners to take him and rack him on the wheel for ten days, then to gouge out his eyes, and finally to drop molten brass into his ears until he died (ἐφ' ἡμέρας δέκα στρεβλοῦν, εἶτα τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς ἐξορύξαντας εἰς τὰ ὦτα θερμὸν ἐντήκειν χαλκὸν ἕως ἀποθάνῃ).[21]

This is a horrifying death (a simple beheading, according to Parysatis, would be too merciful a punishment). Torture scenes in Greek and Roman literature are plenty, and what they usually do is invest in all kinds of appalling details which are reported at a painfully slow and excruciating narrative pace.[22] In a recent monograph dealing with serial killers in classical myth and history, Debbie Felton examines many similar cases of horrifying deaths and illustrates well how sadism, cruelty and horror, in Greek and Roman sources, often take centre stage. In her contribution to this volume, entitled 'The Vocabulary of Homicidal Horror in Libanius' *Against a Murderer*', Felton focuses on a piece of fourth-century CE rhetoric. Libanius' text, as the author observes, turns, time and again, to 'body horror', and invites its readers to imagine and reconstruct vividly scenes of slaughter and death. Although its gory details do not equal those found in Homer and Greek tragedy, it is nonetheless clear that Libanius wishes to convey the horrific deeds of the accused murderer by investing in the *enargeia* of his narrative. Horror, in this case, arises from and is a matter of *full* disclosure.

But, as we said above, horror can be equally a matter of obstructed visibility and compromised perception. To stay with Plutarch, let us cite a part of his famous fr. 178 from *On the Soul*:

> In this world the soul is without knowledge, except when it is already at the point of death; but when that time comes, it has an experience like that of men who are undergoing initiation into great mysteries; and so the verbs τελευτᾶν and τελεῖσθαι, and the actions they denote, have a similarity. In the beginning there is straying and wandering, the weariness of running this way and that, and nervous journeys through darkness that reach no goal, and then immediately before the consummation every possible terror, shivering and trembling and sweating and amazement (πλάναι τὰ πρῶτα καὶ περιδρομαὶ κοπώδεις καὶ διὰ σκότους τινὲς ὕποπτοι πορεῖαι καὶ ἀτέλεστοι, εἶτα πρὸ τοῦ τέλους αὐτοῦ τὰ δεινὰ πάντα, φρίκη καὶ τρόμος καὶ ἱδρὼς καὶ θάμβος). But after this a marvelous light meets the wanderer, and open country and meadow lands welcome him; and in that place there are voices and dancing and the solemn majesty of sacred music and holy visions.[23]

In comparing initiation to death, Plutarch comments at this point on how sheer terror and panic, combined with bewilderment, turn to wonder and revelation. As the initiates find themselves lost in a world of mystic and supernatural associations, they are overwhelmed by horror. The doubling of the two words *phrikē* and *tromos* points to the direction of a paralysed state[24] which shares nothing of the comfort and is clearly juxtaposed to that reserved for those who eventually complete the journey successfully.[25] In *Crassus* Plutarch employs the two terms in unison in order to describe the emotional reaction of the troops when they see the enemy carrying the head of Publius fixed high upon a spear – an act of appalling brutality (ch. 26: τοῦτο τὸ θέαμα Ῥωμαίων ὑπὲρ ἅπαντα τἆλλα δεινὰ τὰς ψυχὰς κατέκλασε καὶ παρέλυσεν, οὐ θυμοῦ πρὸς ἄμυναν, ὥσπερ ἦν εἰκός, ἀλλὰ φρίκης καὶ τρόμου πᾶσιν ἐγγενομένου). But while in that case horror is inspired by a *theama*, in fr. 178 the same emotion emerges out of full and total darkness, both literally and metaphorically.

(e) Horror, however, can also be deeply fascinating. At the very same moment that we feel horrified by something, we may also experience a sort of attraction towards it. In his seminal work *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, eighteenth-century philosopher Edmund Burke writes:

> Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime*; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling.
>
> *1844: 51*

Once again, antiquity can provide us with some solid parallels to this idea. Take, for instance, ps.-Longinus, *On the Sublime* 38.3. At this point the author of the treatise suggests, in his characteristically witty way, that the best kind of *hyperbole*

> is the one which conceals the very fact of its being a hyperbole. And this happens when it is uttered under stress of emotion to suit the circumstances of a great crisis (ἐπειδὰν ὑπὸ ἐκπαθείας μεγέθει τινὶ συνεκφωνῶνται περιστάσεως). This is what Thucydides does in speaking of those who were killed in Sicily. 'For the Syracusans went down and began to slaughter chiefly those in the river. The water was immediately tainted but none the less they kept on drinking it, foul though it was with mud and gore, and most of them were still ready to fight for it.' That a drink of mud and gore should yet still be worth fighting for is made credible only by the height of the emotion which the circumstances arouse (αἷμα καὶ πηλὸν πινόμενα ὅμως εἶναι περιμάχητα ἔτι ποιεῖ πιστὸν ἡ τοῦ πάθους ὑπεροχὴ καὶ περίστασις).[26]

The image of the Athenian troops drinking 'gore and mud' is deeply moving; and because it is phrased the way it does, it meets – according to ps.-Longinus – the criteria of sublime language and imagery. At the same time, though, it is also horrifying, in a very clear, basic and undisputed sense. The miserable state of the imprisoned Athenians in 7.87.1–2[27] could in fact be read as a replay of the plague in condensed form, recalling, among others, details such as the 'foul breath' of the patients (2.49.2: καὶ πνεῦμα ἄτοπον καὶ δυσῶδες ἠφίει), the terrible need for water (2.49.5: τῇ δίψῃ ἀπαύστῳ ξυνεχόμενοι) and the suffocating lack of space (2.52.2: οἰκιῶν γὰρ οὐχ ὑπαρχουσῶν, ἀλλ᾽ ἐν καλύβαις πνιγηραῖς ὥρᾳ ἔτους διαιτωμένων ὁ φθόρος ἐγίγνετο οὐδενὶ κόσμῳ ἀλλὰ καὶ νεκροὶ ἐπ᾽ ἀλλήλοις ἀποθνῄσκοντες ἔκειντο). The plague – a tour de force of body horror – has been described by Thucydides as an *extraordinary* event: a natural disaster that defied human reason and one that could hardly be put into words.[28] There should be little doubt that in ps.-Longinus' mind, the Thucydidean plague would have qualified as a perfectly suitable example of sublime prose.

What we mean to suggest is that the horrific, both today but also in antiquity, is not without its aesthetic appeal; quite the opposite. True, a horrifying scene capitalizes on negative emotions and effects – disgust being one of them, as we mentioned above. But this very same penetrating feeling of disgust can, paradoxically, coincide, under these circumstances, with a morbid kind of fascination.[29] Whether this fascination is experienced as a (guilty) pleasure (one that finds its remote ancestor in Leontius' invincible *desire* to look at the corpses lying outside the northern wall of Athens, in book 4 of Plato's *Republic*)[30] or ends up inspiring feelings of awe and astonishment, which transport the subject into the realm of the sublime, makes no difference; for in both cases what transpires is the realization that horror reveals itself to be something more than a simple combination of extreme fear and revolting disgust, and turns out instead to be also a source of deep thrill and wonder.

Back to the Graeco-Roman past

In the five points that we highlighted above, horror has been seen to encompass both affective and mental qualities; to arise at moments when the powers of our reason fail us; to be crucially linked to other emotions, especially disgust; to be an embodied experience; to test the powers of language; and to co-exist with feelings of deep fascination. This basic grammar is highlighted in all important contemporary discussions of horror – whether one refers to the emotion or to the art forms associated with it.

With these five points in mind, let us now consider the following lines from the opening of Aeschylus' *Eumenides*. This is the scene in which Pythia encounters the terrifying spectacle of the Erinyes, and exits Apollo's temple in sheer fright and confusion (34–63):

> ἦ δεινὰ λέξαι, δεινὰ δ᾽ ὀφθαλμοῖς δρακεῖν,
> παλίν μ᾽ ἔπεμψεν ἐκ δόμων τῶν Λοξίου,
> ὡς μήτε σωκεῖν μήτε μ᾽ ἀκταίνειν στάσιν·
> τρέχω δὲ χερσίν, οὐ ποδωκείᾳ σκελῶν.
> δείσασα γὰρ γραῦς οὐδέν, ἀντίπαις μὲν οὖν.
> ἐγὼ μὲν ἕρπω πρὸς πολυστεφῆ μυχόν·
> ὁρῶ δ᾽ ἐπ᾽ ὀμφαλῷ μὲν ἄνδρα θεομυσῆ
> ἕδρας ἔχοντα προστρόπαιον, αἵματι
> στάζοντα χεῖρας καὶ νεοσπαδὲς ξίφος
> ἔχοντ᾽ ἐλαίας θ᾽ ὑψιγέννητον κλάδον
> λήνει μεγίστῳ σωφρόνως ἐστεμμένον,
> ἀργῆτι μαλλῷ· τῇδε γὰρ τρανῶς ἐρῶ.
> πρόσθεν δὲ τἀνδρὸς τοῦδε θαυμαστὸς λόχος
> εὕδει γυναικῶν ἐν θρόνοισιν ἥμενος—
> οὔτοι γυναῖκας, ἀλλὰ Γοργόνας λέγω·
> οὐδ᾽ αὖτε Γοργείοισιν εἰκάσω τύποις.
> εἶδόν ποτ᾽ ἤδη Φινέως γεγραμμένας
> δεῖπνον φερούσας· ἄπτεροί γε μὴν ἰδεῖν
> αὗται, μέλαιναι δ᾽, εἰς τὸ πᾶν βδελύκτροποι·

> ῥέγκουσι δ’ οὐ πλατοῖσι φυσιάμασιν,
> ἐκ δ’ ὀμμάτων λείβουσι δυσφιλῆ λίβα·
> καὶ κόσμος οὔτε πρὸς θεῶν ἀγάλματα
> φέρειν δίκαιος οὔτ’ ἐς ἀνθρώπων στέγας.
> τὸ φῦλον οὐκ ὄπωπα τῆσδ’ ὁμιλίας,
> οὐδ’ ἥτις αἶα τοῦτ’ ἐπεύχεται γένος
> τρέφουσ’ ἀνατεὶ μὴ μεταστένειν πόνον.
> τἀντεῦθεν ἤδη τῶνδε δεσπότῃ δόμων
> αὐτῷ μελέσθω Λοξίᾳ μεγασθενεῖ·
> ἰατρόμαντις δ’ ἐστὶ καὶ τερασκόπος
> καὶ τοῖσιν ἄλλοις δωμάτων καθάρσιος.

> Horrors to tell, horrors for my eyes to see, have sent me back from the house of Loxias, so that I have no strength and I cannot walk upright. I am running on hands and knees, with no quickness in my limbs; for an old woman, overcome with fright, is nothing, or rather she is like a child. I was on my way to the inner shrine, decked with wreaths; I saw on the center-stone a man defiled in the eyes of the gods, occupying the seat of suppliants. His hands were dripping blood; he held a sword just drawn and an olive-branch, from the top of the tree, decorously crowned with a large tuft of wool, a shining fleece; for as to this I can speak clearly. Before this man an extraordinary band of women slept, seated on thrones. No! Not women, but rather Gorgons I call them; and yet I cannot compare them to forms of Gorgons either. Once before I saw some creatures in a painting, carrying off the feast of Phineus; but these are wingless in appearance, black, altogether disgusting; they snore with repulsive breaths, they drip from their eyes hateful drops; their attire is not fit to bring either before the statues of the gods or into the homes of men. I have never seen the tribe that produced this company, nor the land that boasts of rearing this brood with impunity and does not grieve for its labor afterwards. Let what is to come now be the concern of the master of this house, powerful Loxias himself. He is a prophet of healing, a reader of portents, and for others a purifier of homes.[31]

In terms of genre, we are in the realm of tragedy. But insofar as the emotion is concerned, there is no doubt that what we witness here is a typical instance of horror. To start with, the priestess describes herself as δείσασα (38), crippled with fear. She has just been exposed to a spectacle that is disturbing precisely because she cannot make any sense of it: her attempts to identify the Erinyes fail one after the other, and this is fleshed out in the text through a series of consecutive negations (47–9: εὕδει γυναικῶν … οὔτοι γυναῖκας, ἀλλὰ Γοργόνας … οὐδ’ αὖτε Γοργείοισιν εἰκάσω τύποις). As a result, not only is the spectacle terrifying, it is also extremely difficult to ‘put into words’ (34: ἦ δεινὰ λέξαι, δεινὰ δ’ ὀφθαλμοῖς δρακεῖν). Furthermore, the emotion of fear is crucially linked here to that of disgust. Lines 51–4 place the spotlight on the Erinyes’ incomplete bodies, their appalling appearance, their smelly breath and the loathsome drip that is oozing out of their eyes. As they defy categorization (see, especially, line 59: τὸ φῦλον οὐκ ὄπωπα τῆσδ’ ὁμιλίας), in the same way the Erinyes are disgusting creatures. And yet, in a paradoxical way, they are also deeply fascinating. At lines 46–7 the priestess describes them as a θαυμαστὸς λόχος . . . γυναικῶν, an ‘extraordinary’, ‘marvelous’ sort of women. And when later on she attempts to figure out their exact identity, she does so, significantly, by approximating them to a work of art – to a painting she once saw depicting the Harpies (50): εἶδόν ποτ’ ἤδη Φινέως γεγραμμένας.

Two of the chapters in this volume deal with horror in Greek tragedy. Evina Sistakou, in her contribution entitled ‘The Visceral Thrills of Tragedy: Flesh, Blood and Guts *Off* and *On* the Tragic Stage’, offers a series of selected readings on horrific passages from Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. Starting from the assumption that ‘Greek tragedy is a genre contingent on the representation of violence’, she goes on to ask whether horror and shock was part of the fun for an ancient audience – apart, that is, from the more elevated and refined emotional experience of *eleos* and *phobos* through which catharsis is achieved. Her answer to this question is positive. ‘It is probable’, she points out, ‘that the amazement deriving from the display of horror had a mass appeal, as it was the broader audience of the theatre which would readily recognize and respond to it . . . Amazement caused by horror was a pleasurable experience for the spectators, though not necessarily of high quality.’ To support this point, Sistakou refers especially to Aeschylean sensationalism, drawing our attention to, among other things, the following excerpt from the ancient *Vita Aeschyli*:

> ταῖς τε γὰρ ὄψεσι καὶ τοῖς μύθοις πρὸς ἔκπληξιν τερατώδη μᾶλλον ἢ πρὸς ἀπάτην κέχρηται . . . τινὲς δέ φασιν ἐν τῆι ἐπιδείξει τῶν Εὐμενίδων σποράδην εἰσαγαγόντα τὸν χορὸν τοσοῦτον ἐκπλῆξαι τὸν δῆμον ὡς τὰ μὲν νήπια ἐκψῦξαι, τὰ δὲ ἔμβρυα ἐξαμβλωθῆναι.

The story has it that in the presentation of the *Eumenides*, as Aeschylus brought on the chorus of the Erinyes ‘here and there’ (σποράδην), people were so frightened that the young fainted and women miscarried. The kind of experience that Pythia reports for herself in the lines quoted above is transmitted here to those watching the play.

In his chapter entitled ‘The Horrific Body in Sophocles’, Glenn Most focuses on the *Trachinian Women* and *Philoctetes* in order to explore ‘Sophocles’ fascination with the horrific live human body’ – one that ‘is largely unparalleled in ancient Greek tragedy’. In addressing this fascination, Most proposes a series of possible answers ranging from the poet’s well-attested interest in medicine to his substantial military experience and his interest in theatrical visualization. The images of suffering and disintegrating bodies may also have been meant to highlight ‘Sophocles’ emphasis on the human individual as the locus of the tragic in the world’. Read this way, ‘the horrific body represents the annihilating invasion of the human dimension by the divine’. The catastrophic outcome of the close encounter between the human and the divine realm is a distinctive feature of tragedy, and yet Aristotle, as Most points out, entirely ignores it in his treatment of the genre in the *Poetics*. Related to this absence is the omission, on Aristotle’s part, of any reference whatsoever to horror, which is otherwise repeatedly and strongly highlighted in the reception of tragedy throughout antiquity (particular emphasis in this context is placed by the author on the use of *ekplēxis* in the *Vita Aeschyli* mentioned above). According to Most, these two related omissions derive from Aristotle's attempt to rescue tragedy from Plato's fierce attack 'by domesticating its effects' and by 'attenuating the intensity of the passions it arouses'. He concludes:

> Pity and fear are certainly strong emotions, but they do not put the very identity of the person who feels them fundamentally into question . . . Horror is different: it is far more disruptive and potentially annihilating than either pity or fear, more threatening to the very continuity of a person's identity. This may be why Aristotle excluded it, together with the divine realm, from his *Poetics*. We might say that pity and fear can be plausibly claimed to be assuaged by some kind of catharsis, but that authentic horror leaves scars that may well never be healed.

An interesting contrast emerges at this point between Sistakou's and Most's viewpoints. Though both of them read horror as undeniably present in Greek tragedy, the first entertains the possibility that its sensational effects might have been meant, to some extent at least, to appeal to the tastes of a mass audience. Most, on the other hand, submits that horror is fully present and lies at the very core of tragedy, as an emotion of equal importance to pity and fear. The fact that we do not read about it often has to do with the fact that Aristotle, in his influential discussion in the *Poetics*, leaves it out.

Another reason that might explain this absence may derive, as we would like to suggest, from the fact that horror in general has a bad name, both as an emotion and, by association, as an art form. We somehow think that horror is not sufficiently elevated and refined an emotion to maintain the *pathos* of a respectable piece of fiction or a work of art. And yet, as the case of Pythia in Aeschylus aptly demonstrates, horror by no means obstructs, let alone cancels, our need to engage with the world in an aesthetic way. The fact that the priestess recalls the painting with the Harpies (50: εἶδόν ποτ᾽ ἤδη Φινέως γεγραμμένας) cannot but be read as a statement that what she sees in the Erinyes is a powerful aesthetic potential. In a way, to become fascinated with something that we fear and detest is only human. As William Ian Miller writes, one of the most 'troubling aspects' of the disgusting is the fact that 'it attracts as well as repels. The disgusting has an allure; it exerts a fascination which manifests itself in the difficulty of averting our eyes at a gory accident, of not checking out the quantity and quality of our excretions; or in the attraction of horror films.'*[32]

The same applies in the case of horror. Which is to say that its conspicuous absence in scholarly discussions of Greek and Roman culture may not be related that much to an actual absence of elements that are truly horrific as is derived from the fact that we, as readers of *classical*, 'high' literature, feel uncomfortable with recognizing them and accepting them as such. So what we do instead is give them different names. But this doesn't make horror any less present.

Further considerations

The *Eumenides* scene is unique in its concentration and exploitation of horrific elements; it stands out because of its synthesis of all major ingredients of horror as we understand it today. Kathleen Cruz warns us that this is still not enough. As she points out in her chapter:

> One method through which [horrific] moments [in ancient sources] might be identified would be to track fear and disgust-related vocabulary in relevant languages, following the idea that the appearance of such terminology in certain contexts can offer defensible grounding for identifying those contexts as either causing or containing a relevant fear and/or disgust response – and thus, one of horror . . . Even this, however, ties the course of one's inquiry to that which is stated in the required explicit terms. Perhaps the only way out of this limitation is to use language as a kind of moveable fence rather than an unbreakable wall; appearances from a lexicon of fear and disgust can give us important insight into their triggers in relevant ancient contexts, but we will need to construct defensible ways by which to extrapolate from those explicit cases to larger cultural phenomena.

The caution that is raised here is one we share. It would be too easy, after all, to argue for the presence of horror simply on the basis of what we take to be its attendant vocabulary in antiquity or on the basis of themes, images and motifs that look horrific (to us). At the same time, however, it would be equally mistaken to simply ignore all these parameters on account of the fact that there is no such thing as an established theory of horror in Graeco-Roman antiquity. Thus, what this volume proposes to do is dwell on 'moments' (to use Cruz's word) that are worth exploring with a view to their horrific potential, inviting its readers to consider them as part of the conceptual prehistory of what – at a fairly later point – develops into a concrete and recognizable art form.

It should be clear by now that tragedy turns out to be particularly important in our investigation. This holds true for both Greek and Roman tragedy. Simona Martorana, in her chapter entitled 'Landscapes and Bodies of Horror in Seneca's *Thyestes*', starts with the observation that horror, construed through an intense interplay between fear, repugnance and astonishment, 'is a prominent pattern in the *Thyestes*, perhaps the most gruesome of Seneca's dramas'. Instead of dwelling on the usual horrific suspect of the play – which is no other than Atreus' atrocious slaughter and cooking of Thyestes' sons and the ensuing teknophagy, or 'eating of one's children' – Martorana focuses her discussion on the Tantalid house of Atreus, showing how the building, by means of evoking an infernal landscape, forecasts and participates, in an uncannily animate way, in the dreadful events that unfold. Of particular importance for the author's argument are modern theories concerning the 'vibrancy' of natural features and objects – theories that help highlight how within Atreus' palace, the borders between human and non-human, natural and artificial collapse.

The collapse of borders should be approached, first and foremost, along the lines of biological boundaries, especially those which separate humans from animals. Indeed, horror is mostly felt and reaches its peak when humans turn into animals – not only in the mythical contexts of metamorphosis but also when aggressive animality becomes a feature of violent, deviant human behaviour. Comparative anatomy (pursued for the first time systematically by Aristotle) and dissection practices (see Bubb in this volume, with particular reference to Roman contexts, as well as her recent monograph[33]) also contribute to the revelation of a potentially horrifying 'animalization' of the human body.[34] *Mimesis* in this case (construed as a concept that helps doctors and anatomists understand the operation of human and animal organisms as *imitating* each other) has a strong potential for creating horror. An emblematic and powerful case is that of the monkey, discussed by Marco Vespa, in a recent monograph, in cultural-anthropological but also semiotic terms.[35] The monkey's similarity to, but also deviation from, the human turns it into an unsettling and often monstrous creature and functions as a mirror for similar, equally horrifying deviations such as those manifested by e.g. a eunuch who is conceived as a distorted, repulsive but also threatening kind of male.[36]

With this idea of intra-species horror, one could also associate the taxonomic disorder which ensues when humans turn into flora (as discussed by Estèves in this volume). Recent scholarship has read such myths of metamorphosis in a positive light (see, for instance, Giulia Sissa's ecocritical reading of Ovid).[37] At the same time, we need to acknowledge that there is also something deeply disquieting about the idea of humans being reduced to trees and plants – perhaps even more radical and absurd when compared to the idea of humans turning into animals. Such horrifying metamorphosis can also implicate the human body being absorbed by the surrounding natural environment in an even more diffuse and abstract way. This is the case of the *sparagmos*, the 'tearing apart of the fleshes' where the victim's body is scattered and becomes one with the surrounding landscape – in the myth of Orpheus, Echo or Pentheus, all three having their limbs torn apart and symbolically returned to a state of dry earth and rocks. These bodily metamorphoses, which cannot happen without violence and bloodshed, reflect a cosmological knowledge (an elemental interpretation of living beings, for instance, or an atomic one; the birth of human bodies from earth; and so on) and they allude to the destiny of material decay that awaits all forms of life – animal and vegetative alike – after death.

Humanity, life and matter

One of the most serious implications of Aristotle's distinction between *homoiomerous* (non-composite) and *anomoiomerous* (composite) parts at the beginning of *Historia Animalium* (486a 1–14) is the conceptualization of tissues and substances, of bodily 'ingredients' as infused with life. This distinction was not only a heuristic move which marked an important development in Western biology, it also entailed the recognition that there are individual 'biological' powers attached to and activated by individual substances, especially fluid ones, as part of the living bodies: sperm, blood, milk – the observable spillages we are familiar with from our own bodies and in the company of those of others. Life requires these ingredients (as well as dry ones) to perpetuate itself; and despite the fact that Aristotle settled the question of ontological identity in terms of form, *eidos*, as operating on an explicitly different level from matter and parts,[38] there is still a hovering assumption, in the wider culture, that some form of life might be traced in some of these parts as they survive independently from the whole. Ovid's insistence on *tabes*, 'putrefied bodily matter', but also on 'blood' plays with the horrific effect of these substances as being somehow active with life.[39] The same potential for horror is evoked by blood and its eerie combination with maternal milk in Clytaemnestra's ominous dream in Aeschylus' *Choephoroi*, 523–33.

Body-in-time: Decay and disassembling

All bodies by definition end in the same way: putrefaction and/or dissolution into material homogeneity. In various phases of this process – ageing, illness, agony – when things 'go wrong' with the human body, the individual's 'ingredients' or 'components' lie in open display. Several genres and textual traditions dwell on this display, some with morbid fascination (e.g. tragedy), others with humour and aggressive laughter (e.g. satire) and others with intellectual curiosity (philosophy). Among these genres, medicine is the one that is most preoccupied with the open body. The professional and intellectual enterprise of reconstructing a bodily 'norm' paves the way in this case for a greater horrific effect, via the prognosis of the disaster to come as it emerges through the learned assessment of bodily damage.

The representation of the body as a complete system or combination of parts functioning according to a design is then the blank slate against which the horrific can be painted, and the ancient fascination with physical undoing can be mapped against medical and biological knowledge. In its starker version, this is a specifically Roman trait: Ovid's insistence on horrific maiming and evisceration,[40] Senecan tragedy, Petronius, Lucan's epic are only some of the most well-known and studied examples. But Greek canonical texts also display an attraction to these themes: the myth of the *sparagmos*, mentioned above, mimicked by stories in which packs of animals are the agent (Actaeon the hunter, as his own hounds turn against him), is one of the oldest models in ancient accounts of rituals, variously interpreted over the past two centuries as fertility images (the spreading of 'life' through space as symbolic sowing) or images of sacrificed and shared meals-gone-wrong (Homo Necans[41]). The intense effect of a body being slowly cut into parts becomes mostly manifest in the case of Cleomenes' madness, as reported by Herodotus (*Hist.* 6.75): the Spartan king gets hold of a knife and cuts his own body into strips. A similar thing, as Plutarch tells us, happens to Philologus, who is found to be complicitous to Cicero's death: Pomponia, Cicero's widow, 'forced him to cut off his own flesh bit by bit and roast it, and then eat it' (*Life of Cicero*, 49).

Problematized knowledge about the body, its biological nature, form and substance lies also at the centre of Aline Estèves' chapter entitled '*Cruor in flores mutabitur*: Horrific

Hybridizations in the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid′. On the one hand, Estèves offers a dense overview of scenes of physical violence in Ovid's metamorphic epic, showing how themes and motifs of mutilation, disembowelment, incest and rape are explored by the poet in a poignantly macabre and deliberately innovative fashion – sometimes to grotesque effect. On the other hand, the author invites us to see *horror* as a physical and psychological medium by means of which Ovid contests the established boundaries between different forms of life: a surface of water shuddering with waves; trees with spiky branches or sharp trembling plants; animals with bristles; and monstrous beings whose skin or limbs stand erect – all these elements of nature share, along with humans, a common capacity: that of *horrere*. By further investigating the trope of human blood turning into flower, Estèves highlights distinctly the ways in which macabre scenes of slaughter and death are contingent on the metamorphic interplay between different ontological categories and modes of being. In Ovid's hands, according to the author, such instances of floral metamorphosis are handled with extra care and delicacy – a delicacy which is ultimately contrasted to horror, and even eliminates it: 'In the *Metamorphoses*', she writes, 'this type of transformation, likened to a flower blossoming, arouses more wonder than horror – especially since the purple hues that Ovid associates with blood remove any macabre dimension from this organic liquid and transform each drop into a precious stone or a graceful petal.' The distinction drawn by Estèves at this point between 'wonder' and 'horror', though operative, does not always hold true. Consider, for instance, the following lines from *Metamorphoses* 2 (cited and discussed by Cruz in her chapter):

> truncis avellere corpora temptat
> et teneros manibus ramos abrumpit, at inde
> sanguineae manant tamquam de vulnere guttae.
> 'parce, precor, mater,' quaecumque est saucia, clamat,
> 'parce, precor: nostrum laceratur in arbore corpus
> iamque vale' – cortex in verba novissima venit.
>
> *2.358–63*

> She tried to tear their bodies from the wood and to break away the soft branches with her hands, but bloody drops fell from those spots as if from a wound. 'Stop, I beg you, mother,' cried whichever one was wounded, 'Stop, I beg you. My body is mutilated inside the tree. Now, goodbye.' The bark then reached those words most strange.

This is the mother of deceased Phaethon, who, on seeing his lamenting sisters turning into trees, comes to their rescue. As Cruz points out, Ovid at this point deliberately 'disturbs the boundary between human(oid) creatures and the natural landscape; should the human(oid) remain fixed too long within that landscape, she seemingly runs the risk of becoming part of it'. What is more, the whole scene of floral transformation is given 'in a series of physically violent, emotionally distraught snapshots – from the first two sisters who shockingly realize they can no longer move to the third who begins to rip leaves from her head'. This is pure, sheer horror – and wonder can offer no real redemption. That said, and to return to Estèves, the author's claim regarding the intense aestheticization of certain horrific scenes in Ovid and her ensuing contention that often horror transforms into stylized imagery are of crucial importance: what matters in the end is the beauty of poetry.

Horror between aesthetics and ethics

So far we have been placing the emphasis on aesthetics. Ethics are also part of the picture, and an integral one for that matter. Giulia Maria Chesi, in her chapter entitled 'Horror in the *Odyssey*: A Few Notes on Leodes' Beheading (22.326–9)', reminds us that 'within the Greek literary tradition, what is perceived as horrific strictly depends on the ethical-political structure of the society in which it occurs'. Leodes' beheading, according to the author, is undeniably an act of excessive violence – one that makes the avenging Odysseus look unsettlingly similar to Polyphemus, the prototypical monster in the Homeric epic. Just as Polyphemus seizes two of Odysseus' companions and smashes their bodies to the ground, letting their brains seep out on the soil before he cuts them to pieces for dinner (*Od.* 9.290–5), so does Odysseus chop off Leodes' head, which is subsequently described as continuing to speak words of supplication while it hits the dust – a haunting detail (9.328–9: τῷ τόν γε κατ᾿ αὐχένα μέσσον ἔλασσε. / φθεγγομένου δ᾿ ἄρα τοῦ γε κάρη κονίῃσιν ἐμίχθη). Yet, unlike Polyphemus for whom atrocious acts become a sort of domestic routine, Odysseus does not resort to excessive violence indiscriminately. 'As an avenging hero', according to Chesi, 'Odysseus has to restore his honour *at all costs* . . . In line with the uncompromising dimension of Odysseus' revenge, only the life of those who are *not* suitors is spared.' Chesi's argument is essentially that Odysseus is following a code, something that is confirmed e.g. by the fact that he spares the life of Phemius, who asks for mercy in the exact same words that Leodes is using. Thus, in turning the palace of Ithaca into a slaughterhouse, Odysseus does not switch to the mode of a bloodthirsty monster but remains capable of discerning the limits between what is good and what is bad. The words he speaks after sparing Phemius' life –'doing good is much better than doing harm' (*Od.* 22.374: κακοεργίης εὐεργεσίη μέγ᾿ ἀμείνων) – indicate that for all the killing he has done, Odysseus knows where to draw the line and control his drive to kill more. Thus read, Leodes' beheading, according to Chesi, though appalling and atrocious on first reading, has to be contextualized with a view to the cultural codes and the ethics that shape Odysseus' conception of revenge; and if we do so, perhaps then what at first sight appears horrific transpires in the end to be a socially encoded – acceptable, even – act of brutality.

In her chapter 'Naming the Monster: Forensic Horror and Collective Trauma in Cicero's *Pro Roscio*', Sophia Häberle turns her attention to acts of horrific violence that cannot be said, under any circumstances, to subscribe to any ethical code whatsoever. Häberle discusses *Pro Sexto Roscio Amerino,* a speech written for a criminal trial in which Cicero serves as an attorney to Sex. Roscius junior, who is falsely accused of *parricidium*, the murder of his own father, by a group of conspirators close to Sulla. According to the author, Cicero's main concern in this case is not only to prove his client's innocence, but also to enable communication about violence, guilt and reconciliation in the aftermath of the atrocities committed under Sulla's dictatorship. As Häberle observes, Cicero's conceptualization of the horrors of the Roman civil war revolves, literally and metaphorically, around the *Forum Romanum*: from a public space that is intrinsically linked to lawfulness and social consensus, the *Forum* is seen to turn, during Sulla's proscriptions, to a stage of horrendous violence, religious miasma and collective trauma. Starting from a case of alleged *parricidium*, the speech thus evolves to a wider consideration of the horrors that befell the city of Rome in the recent past.

Horror, medical science, dissection

In her chapter 'At the Borders of Horror and Science: The Social Contexts of Roman Dissection', Claire Bubb starts with an observation that ties up well with Häberle's viewpoint. 'No one could argue', Bubb says,

> that the Romans, as a society, were squeamish. They were comfortable with – indeed, delighted by – a wide range of grisly activities, featuring the torment, disembowelling and dismemberment of various people in various ways and places . . . The Roman Forum periodically displayed the decapitated heads and severed hands of the politically disgraced, left to rot in gruesome warning. On its northern corner, the *Scalae Gemoniae* were a notorious site for the exposure of the corpses of the high-ranking condemned after execution; they were left vulnerable to depredations by the crowd before eventually being impaled with a hook and dragged to the Tiber for ignominious disposal.

Building on these observations, Bubb goes on to examine the social context and the emotive impact of animal dissections performed by Galen in front of the Roman public, submitting that 'dissection was a potent tool for doctors looking to impress, in part precisely because of its potential for horror'. Galen, and other doctors, must have capitalized, according to the author, on 'the Roman fascination with the disembowelment of others', thereby adding 'a thrilling element to the spectacle of animal dissection'. But as Bubb also observes, these dissecting spectacles were not meant to push the audience's emotional reactions to an extreme. Thus while Galen, in his anatomical demonstrations, is seen to exercise an eerie and almost supernatural sort of command of bodies, both animal and, implicitly, human, at the same time he takes care to balance this unsettling effect by reminding, time and again, his audience and his readers that what he deals with are simply animals, some of them humorous and all of them definitely *not* human.

The demonstrations offered by Aristotle and the inquiries of the anatomists before him were largely a visual spectacle for the contemporary audiences. But the opened, suffering body actively involves all five senses. The doctor must dwell on sight, but also on smell and taste – two of the senses that are intrinsically linked to penetration and directly related to 'matter' in its chemistry as we sensorially 'take it in' at its most basic. As a Hippocratic author famously puts it, medicine is one of those arts which benefit the receiver but are painful to the practitioner. At *De Flatibus* 1 we read:

> there are some arts which to those that possess them are painful (ἐπίπονοι), but to those that use them are helpful, a common good to laymen, but to those that practice them grievous (λυπηραί). Of such arts there is one which the Greeks call medicine. For the medical man sees terrible sights, touches unpleasant things, and the misfortunes of others bring a harvest of sorrows which are peculiarly his (ὁ μὲν γὰρ ἰητρὸς ὁρῇ τε δεινὰ, θιγγάνει τε ἀηδέων, ἐπ᾽ ἀλλοτρίῃσί τε συμφορῇσιν ἰδίας καρποῦται λύπας, 6.90 L).

The horror created by the pain of others as we directly sense it, and the urgency that accompanies medical action have not been curbed by the advancements in modern medicine, as Graumann points out in his chapter in this volume. So, the senses remain essential in conjuring horror. Pain and its anticipation, a fundamental part of horror, are the quintessential sensorial experience (the senses are variously discussed and described by their association to pain in ancient psychology, and pain is an important indicator of health as is attested, for example, in the clinical narratives of the *Epidemics*). Pain itself can be understood as a heightened sensorial capacity. What is more, it is associated with pathology, decay and death. A sensorial quality is key in narratives and fictions of horror, where synaesthesia comes to the fore.

The volume's remaining three chapters stay on the subject of the crucial interplay between body and horror. Lutz Alexander Graumann, a paediatric surgeon by profession, in his contribution entitled 'Overcoming Horror: 'Numbness' and Medical Agents. Some Thoughts on Medical Horror in Antiquity and Today', deals with a fact of life – namely that 'Physicians and medical assistants . . . are confronted early on with horrific medical scenes: suffering, crying and dying patients, strange fluxes, swellings and awful smells, ugly deformed parts, and bodies with congenital or acquired diseases'. The chapter offers an overview of horrifying medical cases encountered by doctors both in contemporary medicine but also in antiquity. According to the author, horror was undeniably present in the context of Greek and Roman medical practice, and the fact that certain doctors (especially the Hippocratics) avoided expressing it explicitly should be read as a rhetorical choice on their part. Similarly, the fact that contemporary doctors choose not to express their horror at the moment of their encounter with a dreadful disease or condition should not be regarded as an instance of apathy: what lies beneath is a constant struggle to control their emotions and remain human and empathetic without aggravating the patient's psychological state.

From the clinical settings of contemporary medicine, the volume's penultimate chapter moves us back to the world of Graeco-Roman magic and its selective and intriguing affinities with medicine in the ancient world. Sean Coughlin's contribution is focused on recipes in magical and medical writings, including materials that range from rare and expensive ingredients to filth pharmacy such as urine, faeces and sexual fluids. As Coughlin remarks, this is the kind of stuff that we encounter often in horror today. Accordingly, the author's aim is to concentrate 'on the bodily manifestations and experiences elicited by ancient recipes for horror' and to explore 'the human and animal body, not merely as something subject to horror, but as a medium and even active participant' in the horrific rituals described.

The volume ends with a postscript that moves its readers to nineteenth-century supernatural fiction and investigates horror in its *proper* Romantic and post-Romantic setting. In a chapter entitled 'Dissecting the Gothic: Horror and the Romantic Body in Sheridan Le Fanu's *In a Glass Darkly*', Arden Hegele examines the history of medicine that undergirds 'Green Tea', the first story of one of the nineteenth century's most beloved volumes of supernatural tales, Sheridan Le Fanu's *In a Glass Darkly* (1872). Supposedly a collection of case histories written before 1819 by Dr Martin Hesselius, a 'metaphysical' physician whose occult findings seem always to have a biological explanation, the volume actively recruits, according to Hegele, Romantic-era historical advances in anatomy and pathology in making the claim to objectivity that is essential to the volume's chilling effect on the reader. Historical advances in post-mortem dissection that followed the French Revolution, in particular, have a more profound shaping effect on the volume's representation of its haunted bodies than has hitherto been noticed. But more than this, the influence of Romantic medicine proves to be formal as well as thematic: by tracing Le Fanu's integration of the narrative norms of early nineteenth-century medical reporting into the first of his supernatural tales, 'Green Tea', Hegele examines how the Romantic case history might provide scaffolding for the gothic ironizing of an increasingly codified medical authority. Beyond the layered voices of Hesselius, his patients, and a range of corresponding experts, the collection is framed by a nameless editor, a doctor whose practice is interrupted by a dissecting-room injury. What emerges from the collection's mirrored layers of reporting is an ironic troubling of the relationship between physician and patient authority, an irony that has the effect of undermining the materialist explanations of both Le Fanu's narrators and of the Romantic medical writers who inspired them.

Conclusions: Useful horror?

The collection of chapters we have presented covers a wide range – chronologically, but most of all in terms of genres, angles and discourses. We could not aim for completeness, of course, but the target of variety and combinatory strength, we think, has been amply reached. We shall conclude with a step back, and some more general considerations about the relevance of our topic to the intellectual and cultural history of the ancient world and its tradition. Horror, in fact, as the analysis of the textual examples offered richly shows, is not only a momentary intense experience, but also a set of concepts and expectations. We pointed out above that horror is 'of the body' in a very basic sense: one of the ways to approach it is in terms of a strong, fundamentally physical, 'animal' even, reaction to external pressures, which is permeated by a mixture of fear and revulsion aimed at determining a quick and effective action towards self-preservation. This physical reaction consists of bodily states and behaviours such as freezing, shaking, goose bumps, jumping and being startled, sweating, changes in body temperature, blood pressure and heart rate. Each and every one of these states corresponds, neurologically and at brain level, to specific biochemical alterations.[42]

These physical reactions, which appear to be universally human despite cultural variations, are not only a negative and painful experience, but can also be approached in terms of biological functionality and evolutionary psychology. The classic evolutionary concept of the 'hopeful monster',[43] mentioned by Sigala,[44] is in point here: a startling genetic variation from the average which has the potential to either engender an individual unfit for survival (whether pathologically weak, or a murdering psychopath, say, unable to belong in the social group) or, on the other hand, a genial exception (an artist, leader, athlete, and so on). These *monstra* and their ambiguous potential naturally fascinate audiences for the exceptionality and fitness ideals they incorporate, and the criticality of their destiny.

Ancient literatures and cultures exploited the fundamental ambiguity of the exceptional in various ways, if intuitively by comparison with the evolutionary narrative mentioned above. The monstrous and horrifying as bearer of value, for instance, is present in mythological figures of monstrous saviours, such as the medically skilled centaur Cheiron, or of monsters tamed and weaponized, such as Medusa's deadly glance, the Gorgon on Athena's *aegis*, the Erinyes. The combination of wonderfulness and danger is also in point here: Helen's legendary superlative beauty or Achilles' unbeatable strength are both indissolubly linked to death and bloodshed; they both express one-off individuals with extreme virtues, destinies and consequence.

Horror fiction is known to play with this nexus of contradictory evaluations and emotions in audiences, and to be aware of the onlookers' or readers' enjoyment of the challenging experiences they offer. This has been accounted for in various ways: in psycho-functional terms as cathartic (as Aristotle already did in *Poetics* 1449b21–8); psychoanalytically as 'jouissance', the transgression of a subject's regulation of pleasure which becomes a drive towards the dark, painful, even harmful. If 'jouissance' is Lacan's term,*[45] Freud seminally discussed this feature and its various manifestations in terms of a death drive and as a move 'beyond the pleasure principle', in his 1920 homonymous essay. Finally, and more basically, a contemplation of fictional horror is advantageous as a form of exercise, a way of testing and training our own alertness and readiness to shocks through mock challenges,[46] or all of these together.[47]

As we move away from the level of 'primitive', self-preserving reaction to threat to appreciation of, and even attraction to, horror elicited by fiction, things become more complicated and other specifics emerge. In particular, a strong relationship to knowledge becomes important: knowledge of nature, of body, of human institutions such as family or organized power, of society; and more precisely, a relationship with the undermining of such knowledge and survival information. A horror reaction particularly occurs when the observer faces a shocking suspension of a basic rule of familiarity – whether physical, biological or conventional. This is immediately evident in the fact that a baby or a cognitively deteriorated person are less exposed to, or even prevented from feeling horror other than that coming from basic threats – fire, height, the void. Its full appreciation and effect are the reserve of the adult and seem to gain in intensity with the more information and background awareness the subject has.

Ancient knowledge of the world, cosmology, has as its most basic object of study the components of natural reality: space, time and the environment; manipulation of these are the basic cornerstones of the horror genre (as much as of science fiction, with which the element of knowledge is shared). Next, there is the material, 'chemical' (with an anachronism) basis of the world we inhabit (water, fire, earth) and of living organisms (plants, tissues or 'fleshes', bodily fluids). On an even lower level (and most relevantly to the majority of chapters we are going to explore in this volume), there is the body of the observer and the body of entities observed. All these (elements, living matter, bodies) involve the central branches in ancient (and modern) philosophy of nature: cosmology, biology (anthropological, zoological, but also botanical), anatomy, and of course medicine. With medicine, the inquiry about horror is further complicated by the fact that knowledge becomes inseparable from practice, action and experience; as a consequence, horror is in point in a very personal and subjective way. Horror is further elicited by a contemplation of bodily abnormality: the pathological alteration, the variations of ability and disability, the search for 'degrees' of life and ontological worthiness among beings and species all concur to pose disquieting qualification to questions of identity: what is 'normal' and what is 'monstrous', what is human, animal, or plant, which are the boundaries of the individual living being, what qualifies 'life' (and 'death'), where does consciousness and the self reside in a living creature.

An exploration of classical horror based on a definition of it as a historically shifting phenomenon in the first place – to which individual subjectivity, bodily physiology, knowledge systems and literary conventions all contribute – both sheds new light on ancient Graeco-Roman cultures and helps us rethink, once again, our own presumptions of 'modernity'.

Notes

1. We would like to thank the Cluster of Excellence Roots at the CAU in Kiel for sponsoring the conference that generated this volume, as well as the open access publication.
2. See Felton in this volume (Chapter 9: 'The Vocabulary of Homicidal Horror in Libanius' *Against a Murderer*').
3. See below, n. 11.
4. Heidegger 2010: 365–7.
5. For a recent discussion of the concept of dread in the context of Graeco-Roman antiquity, see the collection of essays edited by Felton 2018.
6. For the uncanny (*unheimlich*) – a concept that is closely linked to horror and the horrific – see Royle 2003: 1–38; Masschelein 2011: 1–16.

7. In twentieth-century horror fiction, this link is particularly evident in the work of H. P. Lovecraft. See e.g. the opening of *The Call of Cthulhu*: 'The most merciful thing in the world, I think, is the inability of the human mind to correlate all its contents. We live on a placid island of ignorance in the midst of black seas of infinity, and it was not meant that we should voyage far. The sciences, each straining in its own direction, have hitherto harmed us little; but some day the piecing together of dissociated knowledge will open up such terrifying vistas of reality, and of our frightful position therein, that we shall either go mad from the revelation or flee from the deadly light into the peace and safety of a new dark age.'
8. For all its philological shortcomings, Lacan's analysis of ἄτη in Antigone – the untranslatable combination of delusion, doom and abomination – hits precisely on this nexus between world and experience (Lacan, *Seminar*, Book VII: 247–8).
9. For fear and horror in the ancient world – with emphasis on Roman culture and literature – see Ingemark and Ingemark 2020 and Estèves 2020 respectively.
10. According to Kaster (2006: 8), the study of ancient emotions *qua* narrative processes or scripts requires that 'we suspend concern with lexical meaning or equivalence and instead think about all such [emotion] talk just as the end-product of a process that engages body and mind together: any emotion-term is just the lexicalized residue of what happens when the data of life are processed in a particular way – through a sequence of perception (sensing, imagining), evaluation (believing, judging, desiring), and response (bodily, affective, pragmatic, expressive) – to produce a particular kind of emotionalized consciousness, a particular set of thoughts and feelings.'*
11. See *Rhet.* 1385b 32–3, with Lada-Richards 1998: 62.
12. King 1981: 23.
13. For the *cinaedus* in antiquity, see Sapsford 2022; Gazzarri and Weiner 2023.
14. See Bernini 2016.
15. They even considered sex with animals as a possibility. For a playful take on this matter, see Smith 2013; for contextualized explorations, see the chapters in Campanile, Carlà-Uhink, Facella 2017.
16. For Classics and the 'queer' see the collection of essays in Haselswerdt, Lindheim, Ormand 2023.
17. For a taste of the terms of the debate, see Richlin 1992 and the discussion by Jackson 2014.
18. See Bernini 2016: 95–134 on jouissance and the trope of 'monsters' and zombies in antisocial queer theories; see also the topic on the agenda of the Summer School 'Reclaiming Queers, Crips and Other Misfits' at Coimbra (https://ces.uc.pt/summerwinterschools/?lang=2&id=26890); Preciado's 2019 conference speech published in English as *Can the Monster Speak?: Report to an Academy of Psychoanalysts* (2021).
19. Lévy 1988: 34.
20. See Moussy 1991: 70, with Lowe 2015: 8–14.
21. Translation in Perrin 1926: 159–61.
22. This is especially true in the case of torture scenes in Greek and Roman historiography; see e.g. Hau 2016: 113, focusing on Diodorus Siculus and drawing some interesting connections with twenty-first-century 'torture horror'.
23. Translation in Sandbach 1987: 317–19.
24. As Seaford 2018: 334 points out, the emotions experienced by the initiates at this point resemble closely those of Pentheus in the earthquake scene in Euripides' *Bacchae.* Cf. Philo, *Legatio ad Gaium* 266–7: μέλλοντος δὲ προσεπιφέρειν ἕτερα, ὑπ’ ἀγωνίας παντοδαπὰς χρόας

ἐνήλλαττεν ἐν ταὐτῷ γινόμενος αἱμωπός, ὠχρός, πελιδνός. ἤδη δὲ καὶ ἀπὸ κεφαλῆς ἄκρας ἄχρι ποδῶν φρίκη κατέσχητο, τρόμος τε καὶ σεισμὸς πάντα αὐτοῦ τὰ μέρη καὶ τὰ μέλη συνεκύκα, χαλωμένων τε καὶ ἀνιεμένων τῶν σωμα- τικῶν τόνων περὶ ἑαυτῷ κατέρρει καὶ τὰ τελευταῖα παρεθεὶς μικροῦ κατέπεσεν, εἰ μὴ τῶν παρεστώτων τινὲς ὑπέλαβον αὐτόν.

25. For the transition from one emotional state to the other in Plutarch's fragment, see Clinton 1992: 87–9.
26. Translation in Hamilton Fyfe and Russell 1995: 281.
27. ἐν γὰρ κοίλῳ χωρίῳ ὄντας καὶ ὀλίγῳ πολλοὺς οἵ τε ἥλιοι τὸ πρῶτον καὶ τὸ πνῖγος ἔτι ἐλύπει διὰ τὸ ἀστέγαστον καὶ αἱ νύκτες ἐπιγιγνόμεναι τοὐναντίον μετοπωριναὶ καὶ ψυχραὶ τῇ μεταβολῇ ἐς ἀσθένειαν ἐνεωτέριζον, πάντα τε ποιούντων αὐτῶν διὰ στενοχωρίαν ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ καὶ προσέτι τῶν νεκρῶν ὁμοῦ ἐπ᾽ ἀλλήλοις ξυννενημένων, οἳ ἔκ τε τῶν τραυμάτων καὶ διὰ τὴν μεταβολὴν καὶ τὸ τοιοῦτον ἀπέθνῃσκον, καὶ ὀσμαὶ ἦσαν οὐκ ἀνεκτοί, καὶ λιμῷ ἅμα καὶ δίψῃ ἐπιέζοντο.
28. See, especially, the phrase γενόμενον γὰρ κρεῖσσον λόγου τὸ εἶδος τῆς νόσου at 2.50.1.
29. On horror and pleasure, see Carroll 1990: 159: '[T]here appears to be something paradoxical about the horror genre. It obviously attracts consumers; but it seems to do so by means of the expressly repulsive. Furthermore, the horror genre gives every evidence of being pleasurable to its audience, but it does so by means of trafficking in the very sorts of things that cause disquiet, distress, and displeasure. So different ways of clarifying the question "Why horror?" are to ask: "Why are horror audiences attracted by what, typically (in everyday life), should (and would) repel them?," or "How can horror audiences find pleasure in what by nature is distressful and unpleasant?"'*
30. See 439e–440a: ὡς ἄρα Λεόντιος ὁ Ἀγλαΐωνος ἀνιὼν ἐκ Πειραιῶς ὑπὸ τὸ βόρειον τεῖχος ἐκτός, αἰσθόμενος νεκροὺς παρὰ τῷ δημίῳ κειμένους, ἅμα μὲν ἰδεῖν ἐπιθυμοῖ, ἅμα δὲ αὖ δυσχεραίνοι καὶ ἀποτρέποι ἑαυτόν, καὶ τέως μὲν μάχοιτό τε καὶ παρακαλύπτοιτο, κρατούμενος δ᾽ οὖν ὑπὸ τῆς ἐπιθυμίας, διελκύσας τοὺς ὀφθαλμούς, προσδραμὼν πρὸς τοὺς νεκρούς, 'Ἰδοὺ ὑμῖν,' ἔφη, 'ὦ κακοδαίμονες, ἐμπλήσθητε τοῦ καλοῦ θεάματος.'
31. Loeb translation by Smyth 1926.
32. Miller 1997: 22.
33. Bubb 2022.
34. See Thumiger 2020a; 2020b.
35. Vespa 2021.
36. Vespa 2021: 326–7.
37. Sissa 2019; 2023.
38. On these questions, see Coughlin 2020, and the other chapters in Thumiger 2020c.
39. See Thumiger 2023a: 481 with n. 39.
40. See Most 1992; Thumiger 2023b; Goyette 2021.
41. Still a profitable anthropological model to think with; Burkert [1972] 1996.
42. See e.g. the reflections in Eichelman 1980, and the thematization and research directions in Fink 2019, under the heading 'stress'; Hudson et al. (2020).
43. First formulated by Goldschmidt 1940 and variously adapted by others in evolutionary biology; see also Johnson and Bouchart 2014.
44. In his oral contribution to the conference which generated this volume (Rodrigo Sigala, 'The Thrilling Forces behind Horrific Experiences: A Neuroscientific Approach').

45. Lacan [1959–60] 2007.
46. Compare Galen's suggestion, in *De Indolentia*, to imitate him and always imagine misfortunes that might happen to us, to be ready if they do (*De Ind.* 52–3); according to a cognitive interpretation the case of horror fiction would be a subgroup.
47. We thank Rodrigo Sigala for these observations in his paper given in the 2021 conference.

CHAPTER 1

HORROR NOW AND HORROR THEN: HORROR’S LONG REACH FROM ANTIQUITY TO MODERNITY AND BACK AGAIN

Kathleen Cruz

Take a moment to consider the term ‘horror’ and its associations. You may picture a vivid collection of discomfiting monsters, from werewolves to vampires to ‘Frankensteins’,[*1] or you may mentally flip through a collection of scattered images: splatters of blood, shadowy and forbidding structures, a hand bursting through the soil of a freshly prepared grave. Your immediate response may not be visual but instead emotional and/or physical: your stomach may drop or turn, your skin prickle with goose bumps, or your body cringe with (perhaps simulated)[2] fear and repulsion – more on that below. Many of us today have a well-stocked catalogue of images and responses aroused by the word ‘horror’ due to its prominence in our global social landscape. ‘Horror’ tends to evoke associations with horror media – predominantly cinematic but also literary – because experiencing horror has become a pervasive commodity in myriad contexts. We may pay not insubstantial money to watch horror films, read horror literature, enjoy a haunted hayride, scream in a haunted house . . . the list could go on.[3]

As a result of the prevalence of horrific works in our cultural consciousness, many of us – even those who do not seek out horror media and may, in fact, actively avoid it – have absorbed a variety of horror’s cues and customary scripts. When we begin a new novel and notice the narrative laying the groundwork for a shockingly contagious and psychologically debilitating disease to ravage the population, we will likely say to ourselves, ‘Ah, okay, zombie story’. Should one take a trip to the movies, especially around October, and encounter a foreboding coming attraction that features a young child, Catholic iconography, and murmurings about possession, it would be very reasonable to expect the trailer to conclude with the physical contortions and deterioration made famous by Regan MacNeil (*The Exorcist*; 1973 film, dir. William Friedkin; 1971 novel by William Peter Blatty). This is not at all to say that all modern works of horror are predictable or inherently bound to previously articulated tropes, images and storylines. Rather, examples of well-established and consistent horror-as-entertainment remain a constant presence. This presence has become especially dominant and fraught in the past two decades, as fictive works of horror have echoed a global social and political sphere itself understood as a realm of horror or ‘horrorism’.[4] As if following the plot of one of its own narratives, horror itself has – with or without our individual knowledge or permission – infiltrated our bodies and minds and come to take up its own personal plot of land.[5]

The preponderance of horror and horrific associations in our collective consciousness raises an important question for those interested in the study of horror in antiquity. First, one must ask whether it is indeed possible to discuss this topic at all without the influence of modernity. Despite the origins of the word 'horror' being rooted in the lexical family grouped around Latin *horror* (including *horridus* and *horrescere*), the term, as noted above, has become deeply associated with a modern collection of creative media and, at times, the social realities it may mirror or question. Second, even if we do believe it is possible to look past modern horror and isolate its ancient counterpart, we must still grapple with the fact that the idea of an aesthetic category that we call horror is an explicitly modern contention. As horrific works have ballooned in number and popularity, critics and scholars have laboured to isolate what exactly 'horror' is and how it works – with noteworthy disagreement. The scholar interested in pursuing horror in the ancient Mediterranean is therefore at least initially trapped in a double bind: they must both work to disentangle themself from the anachronistic associations of modern horror and yet recognize that they are reliant upon these associations to properly theorize what horror itself is in the first place.

In what follows, I propose that the field of modern horror studies offers a profitable way forward for the horror scholar of the ancient Mediterranean through its extensive theorizing about horror's ontology. In particular, its contention that horror can be understood as a definable, affective emotion allows for firmly grounded transtemporal and transcultural study. To illustrate this, I first explore the weaknesses of approaching ancient horror through the question of genre as traditionally put. I then delineate three influential ways creators and scholars have defined horror as an emotional response stimulated by both real-life situations and artistic works; in doing so, I also demonstrate how differently one's inquiry into horror may operate based on which theory one takes on. After laying out these possibilities, I consider how those investigating the ancient Mediterranean may make use of them, including through an overview of how scholars have done so thus far. Finally, I close by offering a few paths forward in our attempt to appreciate the ways in which the ancients both experienced horror and continue to foist it upon others as we engage with their work today.

Navigating the haunted house: Defining horror

The limitations of 'horror-as-genre'

In first thinking about what exactly 'horror' is and how we should conceptualize it, scholars tend to gravitate towards one of two basic conceptual approaches. Either they believe that horror should be identified through a specific emotion or affective response, whatever that may be, or, instead, they contend that it should be understood as a discrete artistic category which evokes a range of emotions (such as intense fear, disturbance, and/or disgust) through a relatively consistent collection of creative devices. Should one adopt the second option, the argument will inherently turn into one of genre along expected lines: i.e. horror is a specific category of creative media – films, literature, visual art, etc. – which uses a predictable ‘formula’ in its storytelling and characters or a ‘structure’ with ‘central, fundamental and underlying oppositions’ (Jancovich 2002: 10, 14) in order to affect its audiences.*[6] Discussion of genre often also turns to temporal considerations, as the appearance of horror *qua* genre is usually identified as evolving out of the Gothic literature of the mid-eighteenth century. More precisely, its emergence is often dated to 1764 and the publication of Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto.*[7] With this work, certain commonplace features of Gothic horror first come into prominence in a cohesive fashion, from dark castles and desolate landscapes to murderous madmen and in- or more-than-human creatures.

Responding to this standard developmental narrative, many scholars of modern horror have illustrated why a broad reading of horror as a historical genre tends to obscure more than it enlightens.[8] Further, a genre-based perspective pushes those primarily interested in antiquity into a difficult spot. Namely, if we take horror to be a genre that finds its beginnings in the eighteenth century, then it becomes very difficult to discuss horror in the ancient Mediterranean without turning to a genealogical argument. There are notable examples in the modern horror canon for which scholars have argued for ancient precedent, as we will discuss further below, but this is neither the majority nor the rule.[9]

To avoid the limitations imposed by this genealogical constraint, one could perhaps argue that certain concepts, images and themes that have become commonplace in what might be called the modern horror genre can still be located in antiquity even if there is no straightforward link of inheritance between them. To offer one example, let us dwell briefly on the shared themes of bodily transformation in both Ovid’s early first-century CE epic, the *Metamorphoses*, and the much more recent *Annihilation* (2018 film, dir. Alex Garland; 2014 novel by Jeff VanderMeer). Both works centre the weakening of borders between the human form and the natural world and explore the emotional reactions, including that of deep disturbance, such processes may elicit. Further, both texts feature evocative scenes of humans or humanoid beings transforming into plant life as one part of how they probe at these concerns.

In Book 2 of the *Metamorphoses*, for example, Ovid narrates the transformation of Phaethon’s sisters after their lengthy grief over his death (2.340–6). When two of the sisters try to move their bodies, they first find that they can no longer move their feet (2.346–9); panning from the bottom of the body to the top, a third sister discovers that her hair has become leaves (2.350–1).[10] As the sisters’ transformation continues, their mother attempts to intervene, to ill success:

> truncis auellere corpora temptat
> et teneros manibus ramos abrumpit; at inde
> sanguineae manant tamquam de uulnere guttae.
> ‘parce, precor, mater’ quaecumque est saucia clamat,
> ‘parce, precor; nostrum laceratur in arbore corpus.
> iamque uale’ – cortex in uerba nouissima uenit.
>
> *2.358–63*

> She tried to tear their bodies from the trunks and broke away the soft branches with her hands, but bloody drops fell from those spots as if from a wound. 'Stop, I beg you, mother', cried whichever one was wounded, 'Stop, I beg you. My body is mutilated inside the tree. Now goodbye.' The bark then reached those final words.[11]

In this description, the *Metamorphoses* disturbs the boundary between human(oid) creatures and the natural landscape; should the human(oid) remain fixed too long within that landscape, she seemingly runs the risk of becoming part of it. Furthermore, Ovid does not represent this potential transformation neutrally, permitting the reader to find horror within it only if they should so choose. Instead, he presents the change through a series of physically violent, emotionally distraught snapshots – from the first two sisters who shockingly realize they can no longer move to the third who begins to rip leaves from her head.[12] The mother's failed intervention after hearing her daughters' cries (2.353–8) further emphasizes the frenzied lack of agency at work here as she desperately labours to free her children, only to be confronted with the incomprehensible truth that body and bark have become one. It is also worth noting that while Ovid closes the episode with an aetiological stamp – the sisters still weep as trees and thus send amber for 'Latin brides' (*nuribus* ... *Latinis*, 2.366) – we remain uncertain regarding the totality of their transformation: have the sisters transformed into trees internally or do they retain their ability to think and feel without a physical mechanism to express it beyond their weeping? Further, do they continue to weep for Phaethon or are their tears now shed for themselves?

The cinematic adaptation of *Annihilation* features a similar corporeal conceit. There, after several scientists enter a strange zone that has appeared on Earth called 'The Shimmer' to explore its contents, they discover that biological matter inside the area is acting abnormally. The group encounters various oddly composite and transformed entities before realizing that while in 'The Shimmer', the DNA of previously distinct living beings is being spliced and reformulated with one another. One outcome of this process is a grove of leafing and flowering plants both shaped and posed like human beings, from adults to what seems to be children, mid-motion. While the source of these flora is at first unclear, their likely and indeed chilling human origin is confirmed both by the team's growing understanding of the situation and, more strikingly, when one member of the group, Dr Josie Radek, gives herself over to the transformation willingly.

Annihilation approaches this element of its narrative very differently from Ovid's poem. First, it shows the final product rather than the full, transformative process; even Josie, who succumbs to the flowering of her own volition after refusing either to 'face' or 'fight' what is happening in 'The Shimmer', shifts quietly off-screen with only a few green tendrils beginning to rise from her arms before reappearing as an implied member of the grove. Second, the horror stems initially from the uncertainty of the events at hand – the scientists, and the audience, suspect the plants were once people but at first cannot confirm it – and thereafter from Josie's quiet acceptance of her metamorphosis (which, at the very least, will prevent her from becoming something she deems worse).[13] In the language of modern horror studies, both passages make use of what we might call *environmental horror* (i.e. horror that arises due to the effects or behaviour of the non-human landscape); while Ovid dwells on how this manifests in *body horror* (i.e. the horror evoked by the graphic display of the unstable human(oid) body), *Annihilation* translates this primarily into *cosmic horror* (i.e. the horror experienced when we must confront the incomprehensibility of the wider cosmos, its workings and our place within it).[14]

At the same time and at a more basic level, both works demonstrate an interest in the boundary between human(oid) and plant – or, more broadly, between varying forms of life. Both narratives locate horror in how the border between different kinds of beings may be transgressed, and both investigate this question along the lines of bodily agency and experience. Yet, while one may profitably consider how the ancient Romans and modern Anglophone creatives and audiences illustrate a common interest in this larger realm of inquiry, arguing for a direct relationship in this case and others like it would be much more difficult, if not untenable. What we have here is a shared thematic concern that moves cross-culturally and cross-temporally, influenced in its unique expression by the creative conventions and socio-cultural anxieties of its specific context.

With examples like this in mind, a genre-based theory of horror rooted in a forward-moving trajectory of chronological development or strict narratological tropes and features proves inadequate to explain what is at work when we turn our gaze toward antiquity. Simply put, an insistence on horror as genre in this context by necessity directs one away from thinking about horror as something that can be experienced in or provoked by the unique circumstances of lived experience considered in the broadest terms; instead, horror becomes a point of teleology, a creative outcome that only we moderns can encounter in its truest form. The ancient Mediterranean does not have a collection of interconnected texts associated with horror (or *horror*) in the way many modern societies do, and horror is not included in ancient taxonomies of genre. As a result, a traditional genre theory closes off many profitable avenues of scholarly investigation.

Three approaches to horror-as-emotion

As many scholars of modern horror have themselves acknowledged, the consideration of horror as its own emotional state – as an affective response to what we might consider horrific things – offers a more viable way forward.[15] Following such an approach, a 'horror genre', if one still desires to think in such terms, would then consist of works which evoke the emotional state of horror. This path, however, is not without challenges either, as theorizations of horror along these lines have varied, at times in contradictory ways. Here, we will consider three prominent strains among these debates, paying close attention to their divergences from one another; while each of the examples below is situated in a larger analysis of the workings of (primarily horror) media, we will limit ourselves to considering how they define horror as an emotion. This will both offer a preliminary understanding of this critical landscape and illustrate how the understanding of horror a scholar of the ancient Mediterranean chooses will have a strong effect on the scope of their investigation.

We may begin with Ann Radcliffe's articulation of horror in her essay, 'On the Supernatural in Poetry', published in 1826 – a work which is often brought forward as the most significant early attempt to pin down the specificity of what we now call horror.[16] In the essay, which is presented as a dialogue, Radcliffe ([1968] 2017: 403) draws a distinction between what she sees as two separate emotional responses: terror and horror.

> Terror and horror are so far opposite, that the first expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life; the other contracts, freezes and nearly annihilates them. I apprehend, that neither Shakespeare nor Milton by their fictions, nor Mr. Burke by his reasoning, anywhere looked to positive horror as a source of the sublime, though they all agree that terror is a very high one; and where lies the great difference between horror and terror, but in the uncertainty and obscurity, that accompany the first, respecting the dreaded evil?*

Radcliffe thus articulates a dichotomy between terror and horror along the following lines: terror is lasting, horror temporary; terror arises out of clarity, horror out of obscurity; terror is a transcendent 'escape' (Botting 2014: 68), horror fleeting and debilitating emotionality.[17] Radcliffe's schema thus presents an aesthetic hierarchy of fear; both terror and horror can be categorized as fear-based responses, but each type is associated with a certain degree of aesthetic privilege and prestige (with terror commanding more and horror less).

When we consider Radcliffe's articulation through this lens, it appears quite similar to that offered much more recently by Stephen King.[18] Where Radcliffe is well situated in the canon of the Gothic, King sits very comfortably as a successful purveyor of a wide variety of modern horrors in both literature and, through the adaptation of his work, film and television.[19] King lays out his understanding of horror in *Danse Macabre*, originally published in 1981, which offers the writer's meditations on both horror itself and a multitude of works which have become associated with it from the nineteenth century on. According to King ([1981] 1983: 21), 'the [horror] genre exists on three more or less separate levels, each one a little less fine than the one before it'.* King (21–2) asserts that terror is 'the finest emotion' due to its focus on mental disturbance, whereas horror is an 'emotion of fear that underlies terror, an emotion that is slightly less fine, because it is not entirely of the mind; horror also invites a physical reaction by showing us something is physically wrong'.* The third level is 'revulsion' (23), which privileges reactions of disgust over fear.[20] As King summarizes with reference to notable works often associated with horror (23):

> Terror is the sound of the old man's continuing pulsebeat in 'The Tell-Tale Heart' – a quick sound, 'like a watch wrapped in cotton'. Horror is the amorphous but very physical 'thing' in Joseph Payne Brennan's wonderful novella 'Slime' as it enfolds itself over the body of a screaming dog. But there is a third level – that of revulsion. This seems to be where the 'chest-burster' from *Alien* fits.*

Like Radcliffe, King distinguishes first between the emotional responses of terror and horror. Both are fear-based, but terror is 'finest' through its association with psychological or mental responses, whereas horror is 'less fine' by also evoking physical responses;

revulsion, which King places at the very end, is not primarily fear-based but rather rests on disgust and is therefore considered the cheapest of the three: 'I recognize terror as the finest emotion … and so I will try to terrorize the reader. But if I find I cannot terrify him/her, I will try to horrify; and if I find I cannot horrify, I'll go for the gross-out. I'm not proud' (25).*

We will return to the question of disgust or revulsion shortly. For now, let us note how King distinguishes between the emotions of terror and horror that lie at the heart of the literary form we now call horror. Despite the differences in their articulations, both Radcliffe and King argue for a fundamental hierarchy between two emotional states: a purer, more transcendent kind of fear (terror) and one that is baser and more constricted in its effect (horror). Thus for Radcliffe and King, a horror work is one which aims to terrify and horrify (and, if nothing else, to repulse) following these distinctions. These emotions are understood as discrete and (more or less) mutually exclusive, existing along a scale of aesthetic value that runs from high to low.

Let us therefore call the definition of horror advanced by formulations like those of Radcliffe and King the mono-emotional aesthetic theory of horror. Following these views, horror itself can best be defined as one of many fear-based responses, especially as inspired by certain aesthetic mechanisms. It is, following this view, a singular emotional response rather than a genre rooted in observable formulas, although it can certainly be evoked by well-established conventions, and works which aim to elicit it may constitute a kind of genre after all.

Our second understanding of horror is related to this idea of an emotional aesthetic theory; the key difference, however, is in privileging not one emotion but rather two. In conjunction with those that understand horror as a special form of fear, several horror theorists and critics have advanced what we may call a dual-emotional aesthetic theory of horror. Following this view, we should still understand horror to be an emotional response evoked by certain triggers (aesthetic or otherwise), but the emotion should be understood not simply as a kind of fear-plus but rather as one that arises from fear combined with other distinct responses.

We may turn to Noël Carroll's *The Philosophy of Horror: Or, Paradoxes of the Heart* (1990) for an influential presentation of this subtype of an aesthetic horror theory. Although Carroll does argue for certain generic conventions in modern horror works, he nevertheless begins his study with the idea that 'horror' itself must first be defined as the emotional response to these conventions.[21] According to Carroll, the emotion we should label horror arises when two other emotions – fear and disgust – intersect, and the arousal of one without the other falls short of what should be deemed horrifying. Carroll (1990: 22) states this in clear terms when discussing reactions to the monstrous: '[a] character's affective reaction to the monstrous in horror stories is not merely a matter of fear, i.e. of being frightened by something that threatens danger. Rather threat is compounded with revulsion, nausea and disgust.'* It is this key distinction, Carroll argues (42), that separates horror as a response from the 'sense of unease and awe, perhaps of momentary anxiety and foreboding' and 'idea that unavowed, unknown and perhaps concealed and inexplicable forces rule the universe' provoked by 'tales of dread'.*

Carroll's description of dread gestures at the domain of terror offered by Radcliffe and King, but the relationship between the two is not understood similarly as a hierarchal spectrum of emotional effect.

While Carroll's presentation of horror as fear-disgust has been an influential representation of what we may call the dual-emotional aesthetic theory,[22] there are others which may more directly bridge the divide between the understandings of terror and horror that we identified above.[23] In his analysis of horror cinema, for example, S. S. Prawer (1980) suggests that the emotion we call horror may be reached by two distinct paths, both based on the combination of two emotions. First, Prawer acknowledges a primary horrific mode that hinges on fear and disgust similar to Carroll's dual-emotional theory. Alongside this, however, Prawer (1980: 7) points to a secondary understanding of horror – which he calls 'the uncanny' – that arises out of a 'feeling of awe and imaginative fear'.*[24] This response is prompted less by grotesque imagery than by an atmosphere of psychological disturbance or discomfort (111–14). In this secondary definition of horror, we may understand Prawer's articulation as breaking down terror as defined by Radcliffe and King or dread as defined by Carroll into constituent parts: psychological fear and awe. For Prawer, however, this combination, too, should be understood as horror.

At a fundamental level, the two camps we have laid out here – Radcliffe and King in contrast with Carroll and Prawer – differ in significant ways both in regard to what horror is (a lesser form of fear versus a combination of fear with a second emotion, either disgust or awe) as well as in what way it should be differentiated from other emotions we might consider similar. In the latter case, terminology slips from one theory to another.

For our third and final option, let us now consider what we may title the biological theory of horror. Like forms of the emotional aesthetic theories, both horror creators and scholars have argued for the biological formulation, and this is the stance taken by H. P. Lovecraft in his lengthy essay, 'Supernatural Horror in Literature', originally published in 1927.[25] There, Lovecraft distinguishes between 'true supernatural horror-literature' (which he also calls 'weird tales', 'weird literature', 'fear-literature' and 'literature of cosmic fear') and narratives which make use of 'mere physical fear and the mundanely gruesome … secret murder, bloody bones, or a sheeted form clanking chains' (2000: 22–3).* Tales which make use of such devices have their place among the broader literary spectrum and can indeed evoke certain emotional responses (Lovecraft suggests such tales may be 'whimsical or humorous', 22*), but they do not and indeed cannot cause a reader to experience proper horror. This emotion, which Lovecraft also labels cosmic fear, is defined by 'a profound sense of dread, and of contact with unknown spheres and powers; a subtle attitude of awed listening, as if for the beating of black wings or the scratching of outside shapes and entities on the known universe's utmost rim' (23).*

So far, Lovecraft's offering does not seem to stray too far from the mono-emotional aesthetic theory of horror delineated above; horror is, again, fear-plus or, more specifically in this case, a heightened, more intellectual kind of fear that we should understand as cosmic dread: a fear that has transcended into awe at the cosmic unknown that surrounds and indeed engulfs the human being. While this sounds more like terror as understood by Radcliffe and King (or like dread as defined by Carroll), Lovecraft uses this definition to justify conceiving of horror as a singular emotion and thus echoes mono-emotional theories.

Even if we lay this confusing web of disagreeing terms aside, however, a more significant difference between Lovecraft's articulation of horror and those we have already delineated arises when we turn to the emotion's source. 'Supernatural Horror in Literature' begins with the claim, 'The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown,'* and Lovecraft swiftly goes on to elaborate (2000: 21–2):

> The unknown, being likewise the unpredictable, became for our primitive forefathers a terrible and omnipotent source of boons and calamities visited upon mankind for cryptic and wholly extra-terrestrial reasons, and thus clearly belonging to spheres of existence whereof we know nothing and wherein we have no part . . . That saturation must, as a matter of plain scientific fact, be regarded as virtually permanent so far as the subconscious mind and inner instincts are concerned . . . And more than this, there is an actual physiological fixation of the old instincts in our nervous tissue, which would make them obscurely operative even were the conscious mind to be purged of all sources of wonder . . . When to this sense of fear and evil the inevitable fascination of wonder and curiosity is superadded, there is born a composite body of keen emotion and imaginative provocation whose vitality must of necessity endure as long as the human race itself. Children will always be afraid of the dark, and men with minds sensitive to hereditary impulse will always tremble at the thought of the hidden and fathomless worlds of strange life which may pulsate in the gulfs beyond the stars, or press hideously upon our own globe in unholy dimensions which only the dead and the moonstruck can glimpse.*

According to Lovecraft, horror is both an ingrained and deeply rooted psychological emotion and physiological response; it has been and will always be a part of the human condition, which by necessity is governed eternally by what we might consider certain horror triggers (for Lovecraft, primarily the vast unknown). In the remainder of his essay, Lovecraft works to demonstrate that 'the horror-tale is as old as human thought and speech themselves' (23) through a chronological survey of myth, religious practice, and, with the greatest focus, literature.[26]

While Lovecraft is an aggressive and influential proponent of the biological theory of horror, he is by no means alone. More recently, for example, Mathias Clasen (2017: 13) has argued for what he calls an evolutionary theory of horror which he believes validates Lovecraft's 'common sense–folk psychology' with 'recent advances in neuroscience and the cognitive science of religion'.*[27] First, Clasen, too, positions horror as a kind of fear variant; this comes through both in the name of his research centre – the Recreational Fear Lab, based at Aarhus University in Denmark – and in his stated definitions of horror and its function. The introduction and first movement of Clasen's 2017 monograph *Why*

Horror Seduces speak, in certain ways, with an intensely Lovecraftian voice. There, horror – and it is interesting to note that Clasen is also particularly interested in what he calls 'supernatural horror' – is 'the kind of fiction that is manifestly designed to scare and/or disturb its audience'* (2017: 3, 4, 29):

> My central claim is that horror fiction is crucially dependent on evolved properties of the human central nervous system . . . Horror fiction targets ancient and deeply conserved defence mechanisms in the brain; when it works, it works by activating supersensitive danger-detection circuits that have their roots far back in vertebrate evolution, circuits that evolved to help our ancestors survive in dangerous environments . . . Horror fiction, in other words, works by throwing a livewire into ancient structures in the audience's central nervous system.*

Like Lovecraft, Clasen understands horror to be an eternal paradox – a negative emotion from which humans derive intense pleasure.[28] Where Clasen innovates on his predecessor – and indeed offers a much greater degree of specificity and precise categorization – is in his application of the work of the soft and hard sciences.

As we conclude our necessarily brisk survey of these divergent horror theories, let us briefly apply them to a select test case to illustrate their differences. Consider the following two passages: the first from the climax of the Senecan *Thyestes* wherein Thyestes realizes something is wrong with his meal, and the second taken from the close of Book 7 of Statius' *Thebaid*, wherein the warrior-priest Amphiaraus is swallowed by the earth:

Satias dapis me nec minus Bacchi tenet . . .
Quis hic tumultus uiscera exagitat mea?
quid tremuit intus? sentio impatiens onus
meumque gemitu non meo pectus gemit.
Adeste, nati, genitor infelix uocat,
adeste. uisis fugiet hic uobis dolor –
unde obloquuntur?

Sen. Thy. *973; 999–1004*[29]

> Enough of feasting and no less of wine holds me . . . What is this turmoil that upsets my guts? What has trembled within? I feel an unbearable burden and my chest groans with a moan not my own. Come here, sons, your unlucky father calls you, come here. This pain will flee once I see you – where do they reproach me from?

iamque recessurae paulatim horrescere terrae
summaque terga quati grauiorque efferuere puluis
coeperat; inferno mugit iam murmure campus . . .
    ecce alte praeceps humus ore profundo

> dissilit, inque uicem timuerunt sidera et umbrae.
> illum ingens haurit specus . . .
> sicut erat, rectos defert in Tartara currus,
> respexitque cadens caelum, campumque coire
> ingemuit, donec leuior distantia rursus
> miscuit arua tremor lucemque exclusit Auerno.
>
> *Stat.* Theb. *7.794–6; 816–18; 820–3*[30]

> Now the earth shuddered as it began to pull back bit by bit, the uppermost surface to shake, and heavier dust to burst forth; now the field bellowed with an infernal roar . . . Look how the earth flew violently apart with a deep gaping, and the stars and shades grew fearful in turn. An enormous chasm swallowed [Amphiaraus] . . . He drove his chariot as he was straight into Tartarus; he looked back at the sky as he fell, and he groaned as the field came back together until a lighter shaking mixed the separated plains again and shut out light from Avernus.

One might initially and reasonably consider both of these scenes to be ones of horror. In the first case, one might claim, following Charles Segal (1986: 331), that 'the horror is quite literally visceral',* as Thyestes has just consumed his slaughtered sons.[31] In the other, the earth has abruptly burst open in a scene presaging 'subterranean horror'* (Seo 2013: 150) to swallow a living man whole; Statius' description further emphasizes the incredible fear and intense emotion felt at the unexpected sight (7.797–803). Yet, if we consider each passage following our three theories of horror, we find varying results. Following the mono-emotional aesthetic theory, it seems that the first passage contains horror as Thyestes' mind grows more closed and panicked following his fear-response, whereas the second passage is one not of horror but of terror based on the sublime imagery of the earth's chasm. Following the dual-emotional aesthetic theory, the first passage is also horror because of how the fear evoked by Thyestes' panic mixes with the disgust felt by what he has consumed; both the situation and its physicality lead to horror. Applying the Carroll-inspired fear and disgust version of this theory means the Statius passage holds no horror at all but instead dread, whereas if we consider a Prawer-based fear and awe dual-emotional aesthetic theory, we may locate horror at the implications of the underworld briefly infiltrating the mortal plane. Finally, if we consider the biological theory of horror, the first passage might be dismissed as, to reiterate Lovecraft's language, an example of only 'mere physical fear and the mundanely gruesome', whereas the *Thebaid* passage might be taken as horror of the cosmic kind due to its emphasis on mortal cognitive shock.

This limited comparison thus offers us an opportunity to appreciate how differently a description or episode may be read based on which theory of horror one applies. For now, these three examples in no way exhaust the manifold ways in which creatives and theorists have worked to unpack what horror is and how it works.[32] They do, however, offer a useful dip into horror's potentially opaque pool and reiterate that to speak of horror is no simple thing. Horror itself remains, if not wholly nebulous, a site of legitimate and continuous contention. The scholar who wishes to consider the ontology and function of horror in antiquity must begin by making the important choice of what they themselves believe horror to be and justifying how such a stance can in fact be extended to the Mediterranean past.

The murky mirror of modern horror

Now that we have outlined several approaches one might take to unpack what horror is, we must consider how best to utilize them in the study of horror in the ancient world. Each of the three affect-oriented theories is grounded in the understanding of one or two well-established emotions – predominantly a certain kind of heightened fear, but also disgust in Carroll's dual-emotional theory and a form of psychological awe in that of Prawer.[33] Scholars of psychology and the emotions have argued strongly that both fear and disgust are innate human emotions which occur throughout time, space and cultural contexts; what will differ from one cultural context to the next is not the existence of fear and/or disgust but rather what kinds of stimuli may trigger them.[34]

If one were to move forward with any of these three theories of horror, one could do so by tracking moments either based on the lived reality of ancient experience or as inspired by creative works that one believes evoke the necessary sense of heightened fear and/or disgust. These arguments could then be justified by situating them among greater understandings of these emotions as culturally relevant to the case at hand. Should one adopt the biological theory of horror – whose claims of psychological inherency perhaps make it an especially tempting one to examine in antiquity – one may desire to take the additional step of demonstrating in at least some capacity that the culturally situated fear trigger under consideration is rooted in the kinds of evolutionary mechanisms championed by figures such as Lovecraft and Clasen.

One method through which such moments might be identified would be to track fear and disgust-related vocabulary in relevant languages. The appearance of such terminology can offer defensible grounding for identifying certain contexts as either causing or containing a relevant fear and/or disgust response, and thus, one of horror. To remain with the example set by our Latin texts above, the language offers rich possibilities for expressing fear and disgust. Should one follow the mono-emotional theory of horror and wish to track a vocabulary of fear, one might mark the appearances of verbs such as *timere, metuere*, *formidare*, *horrere*, *tremere*, *trepidare*, *pallere*, *pauere* and *terrere* or associated nouns and adjectives including *timor, metus*, *formido*, *pallor*, *terror*, *horror*, *timidus*, *formidabilis*, *pallidus*, *horribilis* and *trepidus*. Those interested in a dual-emotional theory that features disgust might begin their search with *pigere* and *piger*, *fastidere* and *fastidium*, and move outwards from there. After isolating such terms and the moments in which they appear, one could then examine each case closely to see where horror itself appears to be present (rather than, say, terror or dread).[35]

Such an approach when taken on its own, however, would likely lead to some dissatisfaction, as it would demand that one operate under two assumptions: first that in the case of both historical and fictive situations, emotions can only arise when they are explicitly named; and second – thinking primarily of fictional narratives – that the reader's response is meant to parallel that ascribed to a character or situation.[36] To elide this issue, one may instead combine an attention to relevant vocabulary with a focus on conceptual terms that often appear in connection with it and that may be trusted to elicit such emotional responses, even when those responses are not explicitly stated. In the Latin case, one might, for example, pay special attention to the appearance of evocative terms like *nefas,* to which we will return in a moment, that are associated with great disturbance. Even this, however, ties the course of one's inquiry to certain explicit lexical markers. Perhaps the only way out of this limitation is to use language as a kind of moveable fence rather than an unbreakable wall; appearances from a lexicon of fear and disgust can give us important insight into their triggers in relevant ancient contexts, but we will need to construct defensible ways by which to extrapolate from those explicit cases to larger cultural phenomena.

With this potential roadmap sketched out, we may appreciate how classicists have so far applied different aspects and versions of this approach; in particular, I would like to highlight briefly two examples of scholarship which have worked with the kinds of horror theories unpacked above. In his study of the *Thebaid*, Randall Ganiban makes careful use of Carroll's theory of horror to elucidate the role and effect of *nefas* in the epic. As he states with qualification (2007: 50):

> While I would not claim that the *Thebaid* functions quite like a modern work of horror, there is an interesting connection between the transgressive nature of *nefas* and things that arouse horror, both in their subversive potential and in the fascination and disgust that entices us to experience them vicariously through literature.*[37]

Following Ganiban, by connecting these terms and exploring their intersection – particularly through the 'disjunction' Statius creates as 'the criminality of the brothers' conflict, always known to the reader, is continually suppressed or ignored by characters' (2007: 44) – we can appreciate how 'horror and *nefas* play such important roles in the generation and pleasure of the *Thebaid*' (69).*

In this analysis, Ganiban is most interested in aspects of Carroll's theory that build on his definition of horror as an emotional response rather than that definition itself; he does not repeat Carroll's formulation, for example, but simply speaks of 'horror' throughout. His focus, instead, is on certain features of Carroll's greater cognitive approach to horror, especially the question of its potentially subversive nature (49–50). In other words, we might say that Ganiban is more interested in how horror works and why it is pleasurable rather than what it strictly is, as has been our own focus. While the question of 'horror' itself is thus somewhat elided, his work nevertheless suggests one way to apply a modern theory of horror to an ancient text and, with its focus on *nefas*, draws on a form of the more fluid version of the lexical approach outlined above.

Aline Estèves offers a more expansive study of horror across two genres of Latin literature in her monograph, *Poétique de l'horreur dans l'épopée et l'historiographie latines*. There, Estèves (2020: 14–15, 21) primarily allies herself with the mono-emotional aesthetic theory as represented by King, claiming King's articulation offers the greatest specificity.[38] With King providing the theoretical backdrop from which the investigation can begin, Estèves proceeds to build further sub-theories of horror in ancient contexts. She first conducts a thorough examination of Latin's psychological and physiological lexicon of fear to gain an understanding of the situations in which horror arises; with this groundwork completed, her study goes on to unpack how certain rhetorical and aesthetic techniques may evoke different kinds of fear – and thus horror.[39]

Of these two examples, it is Estèves who most fully embodies the potential way forward outlined above; this should be expected, as her study considers horror as its central focus, whereas horror features as only one part of Ganiban's wider analysis of Statius' poem. In this work, Estèves takes on a defensible modern theory of horror that begins with defining horror itself (that of King) and articulates the reasons for her selection; by doing so, she recognizes that horror should be considered through a conceptual lens in ancient contexts rather through that of genre and draws on the identification of fear as a universal emotion (2020: 20–3). At the same time and while this is a more central feature to Esteves' investigation, both scholars connect their exploration of horror with relevant points of terminology. We noted above that there may be certain limitations to this approach, especially considering that even our brief foray into horror theory has suggested how divisive one's choice of definition may be. That said, the examples of Ganiban and Estèves offer important models, at least in the case of literature, through which one might approach the question of horror in the ancient world by making use of horror's place in contemporary discourse.

This is, perhaps, a defensible and even profitable way forward: situate one's investigation among prevalent theories of horror and navigate said investigation with a careful method – whatever that method is – of tracking when the relevant markers of one's understanding of horror arise. Such an approach recognizes the challenges of defining horror that have persisted for several centuries while allowing work to move forward. One might, however, question the overall validity of these modern theories of horror for work in antiquity. While, as we have seen, certain prominent strands of horror theory argue for the universality of horror as an emotional response, they very rarely dwell on examples from the ancient Mediterranean in doing so. Carroll's monograph may feature Francisco Goya's *Saturn Devouring His Son* (*Saturno devorando a su hijo*, 1821–23) while the first movement in Lovecraft's horror chronology in 'Supernatural Horror in Literature' – a subsection titled 'The Dawn of the Horror Tale' – includes examples such as 'the werewolf incident in Petronius, the gruesome passages in Apuleius, the brief but celebrated letter of Pliny the Younger to Sura, and the odd compilation *On Wonderful Events* by the Emperor Hadrian's Greek freedman, Phlegon' (2000: 25).*[40] Such references, however, often remain superficial, with their inclusion serving to demonstrate the consistency of horror's presence and/or importance rather than to provide a rich example of how, exactly, the ancient case exemplifies the horror mechanism on which the relevant theory is built.

It would therefore not be unreasonable for the scholar of antiquity to be sceptical of such theories' applicability for the kinds of investigations they would like to pursue. The trouble with rejecting them entirely, however, returns us to where we began: namely, we must then confront the fact that the very idea of thinking about horror as a category unified and robust enough to support focused investigation is a historically and culturally contingent one. More specifically, our own ability and indeed inclination to consider the study of horror is the result of both the immense popularity and influence of horror works over the past two centuries and the socio-political landscape that has evoked them. Even if, as we noted above, there are good reasons to reject a teleological genre theory of horror, rebuffing this view of horror's ontology does not mean we can wholly sidestep its contribution to the way horror is now conceived. This trouble remains whether one aims to investigate horror in creative works or in the realities of daily life. In both forms of inquiry, one simply must begin with an idea of what horror is, and so without the implementation of a defensible theory, one is merely locked into a kind of Socratic hunting ground with one's analysis left open to attack. While every horror theory considered above excluding that of genre argues for the universality of horror – due to either the omnipresence of certain key emotions or horror's foundation in our biological mechanisms – there is a reason that scholars have been arguing for that universality recently rather than, say, in the third century BCE.

With this in mind, one might think about the application of horror studies to the ancient Mediterranean as a kind of two-way road. In one direction is our temporally backwards utilization of modern horror theory in ancient contexts. In the other, however, moves the kind of winding but nevertheless existent path for which many horror theorists argue when connecting the much more recent works that have birthed horror theory with ancient ideas, figures and texts.[41] Beyond gestures toward a vague but grand narrative of universal horror, more focused proposals for locating the origin of influential works in our own horror canon – works which remain fundamental case studies for the building of horror theories – in antiquity remain many.[42] This, then, leaves us with our two-way road, wherein horror moves backwards and forwards, from modernity to antiquity and back again, only to repeat.

Acknowledging horror studies' contingencies in this way does not necessarily resolve the concerns regarding the application of modern horror theory that we outlined above. It may, however, assist us in appreciating that one profitable way forward is simply to engage in that application thoughtfully. The very fact that theories of horror make such robust claims about their universal applicability without fully considering the evidence from cultures like those of the ancient Mediterranean – which is only one missing data set among many others – means that there is exciting work for the scholar of antiquity to contribute. The consideration of where horror arises and how it functions in ancient contexts, both historical and fictional, offers fruitful test cases against which available horror theories can and indeed should be applied. From the other direction, taking horror seriously as an intellectual project and approaching our ancient sources with a rigorous understanding of its mechanisms may continue to open previously unseen pathways. Here, then, is what we might consider a second two-way road, this one promising both ourselves and the ancients more and richer horrors.

Notes

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1. Although he emphasizes that one should not be reductionist, King 1983: 49–81 identifies these three creatures as core to modern horror stories (although Frankenstein is considered a prime example of 'The Thing Without a Name'). Tudor 1989: 7 similarly remarks: 'Vampires, werewolves, zombies and the rest are part of the conceptual apparatus of any horror movie audience.'*
2. See Carroll 1987 and 1990: 63–88 on different approaches that have been taken to the question of how exactly works of horror provoke such strong responses from their audiences. One theory which Carroll discusses and rejects is what he titles the 'Pretend Theory of Fictional Response' and attributes to Walton 1978, wherein audiences enact fake or feigned responses to media they also understand not to be real. See Leffler 2000: 208–13 for a defence of Walton 1978 and 1990 against Carroll and others.
3. See Clasen 2017: 147–63 for particularly vivid examples of contemporary horror-as-entertainment.
4. On 'horrorism', see Cavarero 2009. For recent discussions of contemporary horror fiction's relationship to social and political realities deemed horrific, consider Benson-Allott 2018, Brooks 2018, Church 2021, Mee 2022a and 2022b.
5. Such a process may most immediately bring the designation 'body horror' to mind. For an introduction to the form and its mechanisms, see Jones 2002: 175–80, Cherry 2009: 120–4, Lopez Cruz 2012, Aldana Reyes 2014 and 2020; Kane and O'Regan (eds) 2012 collect notable literary examples.
6. The use of 'formula' can be fraught in genre criticism regarding horror considering, as Neale 1980: 2 observes with palpable distaste, its history as a 'pejorative term' in discussions where genre 'was the magic word used by the establishment to found their allegation that "popular" cinema was a mass-produced factory product devoid of personality'.* It does appear, however, even in studies that aim to illustrate the unique value of horror works; see Kawin 1986: 241. To offer an example of the latter idea of genre, we might consider the view of Robin Wood, which continues to have its followers (consider Knöppler 2017, esp. 10, 27–34) and is a useful representative of psychoanalytic approaches to horror; see also Creed 1993 for an especially influential study in this vein and Hutchings 2004: 55–76 for a summary of other approaches. Wood 2018 considers 'the basic formula' of horror, which 'covers the entire range of horror films', to be when 'normality is threatened by the monster' (83–4) because 'the true subject of the horror genre is the struggle or recognition of all that our civilization represses or oppresses, its re-emergence dramatized, as in our nightmares, as an object of horror, a matter for terror, and the happy ending (when it exists) typically signifying the restoration of repression' (79).* While such definitions are structural and thematic rather than focused solely on narrative devices and plot points, they still take (primarily cinematic) modern horror works as the greater phenomenon they aim to explain, and so such theories do not particularly elucidate ancient horror. For further concerns with this kind of approach with an eye to modern cinema, see Jancovich 2002: 12–14.
7. See Jancovich 1992, Colavito 2008, Aldana Reyes (ed.) 2016, Dixon 2023 for accounts of 'horror' that emphasize its chronological development, particularly from the Gothic onward and with an eye to socio-cultural developments; Bloom 2020 also observes the slippage between the Gothic and other aesthetic labels including horror. Hutchings 2004: 9–15 raises concerns for seeing Gothic literature as an origin point for horror film in particular as this

'inevitably ends up marginalising the economic forces at work in the creation of horror cinema' (15).* See Prawer 1980: 8–47, Twitchell 1985: 40–64, Douglas 1966: 2–14, Morgan 1998, Tudor 1989: 27–78, Leffler 2000: 35–56, Knöppler 2017: 21–3 for less extensive but similarly oriented narratives. Wells 2000 offers a chronological account of horror film that dwells less on literary origins, while Leeder 2018: 3–88 begins with cinema. Jancovich 2002: 2–10 provides a similar discussion – also focusing on horror film and with the question of literary origins deemphasized – while problematizing such an approach.

8. See Jancovich 2002: 10–19 and Cherry 2008: 1–51 for a helpful summary discussion. As Cherry notes, rejecting a genre view of horror as traditionally conceived need not mean refusing to consider any sense of subgrouping for works which aim to evoke horror as an emotional response. Cherry 2008: 3–4 suggests identifying a modern horror genre 'as a collection of related, but often very different, categories',* each of which may stimulate a horrified reaction by different means – and which may at times overlap with one another. We may consider the category of body horror which focuses on unpacking the impermanence and instability of the human body (see n. 5) or a content-driven one such as supernatural horror which will centralize monstrous or inhuman creatures. Tudor 2002 offers an in some ways similar view, although with a greater emphasis on culturally grounded groupings. On a further point relevant for those interested in ancient horror, Jancovich 2002: 13–14, drawing on Tudor 1986, observes that attempts to unify genres through structuralist approaches are also hampered by the fact that they are generally based on select test cases and aim 'to say that particular films were *really* westerns, musicals or horror films, and that others *really* were not' and thus end up 'excluding everything' or 'including everything'; see also Tudor 1989: 5–6 on genre as a 'social construction'.* Hutchings 2004: 2–3 observes a similar concern. Following this, the rules set by such test cases and the socially and culturally dependent nature of genre are likely to be particularly unhelpful for those working on very different, ancient material.
9. Beyond the inspiration for specific tropes or creatures, some have also at times applied the labels of what might be considered certain subtypes of horror to ancient texts. For example, Ogden 2018: 173 labels Lucan's catalogue of snakes in *Bellum Civile* 7 as 'Roman-Gothic', prompted by Lucan's 'excessive and exaggeratedly descriptive style'.*
10. Anderson 1997: 268, *ad. loc.* 350–2 remarks that this '[indicates] either that Aigle has started to change at the other extremity or that she is in the second stage of metamorphosis, already rooted'.*
11. All translations from Latin are my own. The Latin text of the *Metamorphoses* is that of Tarrant (ed.) 2004.
12. This episode is perhaps an especially notable example for our purposes, as Murray 1998: 95, n. 7 has observed that it proves an exception to Ovid's more general avoidance of confirming that physical transformations elicit pain. See also Sharrock, Möller and Malm 2020: 3 on how this scene '[emphasizes] the suffering involved in metamorphosis'.*
13. Not all viewers respond primarily to Josie's choice with horror. Brown 2021: 177–8 reads Josie's 'relinquishment of the idea of gene ownership'* and egoistic primacy as one way forward for human beings considering changing real-world ecologies.
14. For an introduction to environmental or eco-horror, see Gambin 2012, Murray and Heumann 2016; see also Alder and Bavidge 2020 for a summary of ecogothic. See n. 5 on body horror and n. 25 on cosmic horror, which is best elucidated when we turn to Lovecraftian theories of the form.
15. For discussion of horror as an affect and emotional response in addition to the examples discussed below, cf. Twitchell: 1985: 10–11, Leffler 2000: 10–26, Williams 2003, Prince 2004: 2–5, Hill 2005: 13–32, Cherry 2009: 45–93, Kawin 2012: 2–19, Aldana Reyes 2016, Church 2021: 15–19.

16. On Radcliffe's importance to Gothic literature, see Botting 2014: 57–69.
17. On Radcliffe's reliance on the Burkean sublime and how it appears in her work, see Bruhm 1994: 30–58, Watson 2020.
18. While our examples must be limited here, we should of course note that Radcliffe and King are not alone in working to draw out a distinction between horror and terror, although Radcliffe has remained influential. See Wynter 2014: 36–46 for an overview of the approaches taken to this question and Querido and Ibáñez-Rodríguez (eds) 2019 for a recent exploration of these collective emotions in lived and creative contexts. For further examples rooted in horror studies, see also Twitchell 1985: 16–22, Heller 1987: 18–20, the former of which coheres well with Radcliffe's binary overall.
19. King is also often associated with the Gothic (American or otherwise) and included in analyses of the form; see for example wider studies including Magistrale 1988, Clemens 1999: 185–212, Oakes 2000, Sears 2011, or narrower close readings such as the more recent Kurtz 2020.
20. We might note that King is very reluctant to give a definition of horror, which he believes to be a fruitless endeavour (1983: 16): 'It's a trap, this matter of definition, and I can't think of a more boring academic subject . . . it is really a discussion of how many angels can dance on the head of a pin, and not really interesting unless those involved in the discussion are drunk or graduate students – two states of roughly similar incompetence.'* Elsewhere (21), even after laying out the hierarchy noted above, King makes use of statements such as 'horror simply *is,* exclusive of definition or rationalization.'* This reluctance for firm definitions can also be seen in King's combined vocabulary of horror as both a genre in the terms discussed above and as an emotion. My apologies to King for presenting his work in the exact kind of academic analysis he dislikes.
21. Carroll systematically calls horror produced by works of fiction 'art-horror' in order to distinguish it from a horrified response elicited from real-life situations; see Carroll 1990: 12–13 for the difference between 'art-horror' and 'natural horror'. He is not alone in making this distinction; Twitchell 1985, for example, uses the term 'artificial horror' when discussing creative works. Carroll is only interested in arguing for 'art-horror' in his study as he claims discussing examples of horror both fictional and factual is a much too sprawling project, but the focused scope of Carroll's book does not preclude the application of his theory of horror to a wider range of contexts. For further potential problems with the distinction Carroll makes here, consider, for example, Brooks, McGee and Schoellman 2016, esp. 240–1.
22. Other features of Carroll's account – particularly his claim that this fear–disgust response arises in horror works through an encounter with some kind of boundary-confusing monster which audiences unpack through a mystery-narrative structure akin to a detective story – have proven especially controversial. Hills 2005: 14–24 summarizes and furthers relevant points of scholarly disagreement regarding Carroll's greater argument.
23. See Kawin 2012: 3 for a similar definition to Carroll's that also shows a greater debt to King.
24. Prawer 1980: 6–7 acknowledges that he allows for 'slippage' (Jankovich 2002: 8) between the use of 'horror' and 'terror' in order to stress for continuity between what have come to be known as 'literary "tales of terror"' and 'the "horror movie"', with 'the cinematic tale of terror' or 'terror-film' sometimes also substituted for the latter; Prawer is, though, consistent in discussing these two 'denotational pole[s]' of horror/terror throughout his study.* Cherry 2009: 45 points to Prawer's model as 'extremely fluid' compared to other horror theories.
25. For Lovecraft's essay and its influence, see Joshi (2000) and Moreland (ed.) 2018. See Joshi 1982/1996: 46–50, Botting 2014: 167, Ralickas 2007, Walden 2017 for useful discussions of Lovecraft's ideas of cosmic fear/horror.

26. Lovecraft's interest in human evolution and biology is not isolated to defining horror but instead spans a greater preoccupation with racist beliefs and fears related to White Eurocentric views regarding race/ethnicity. On this, see St. Armand 1977, Joshi 1982/1996: 41–3; 2010, Frye 2006, Ellis 2010, Guarde Paz 2012, Sederholm and Weinstock 2015.
27. While his 2017 monograph presents these views in a full form, Clasen has pursued this approach for some time; see Clasen 2010, 2012, 2014 for only a few examples of his consistency on this point. See Asma 2014 for the application of this view outside of horror fiction. The idea that horror serves some kind of necessary educational purpose can take other forms than that discussed here; Twitchell 1985, for example, understands horror as containing 'formulaic rituals coded with precise social information needed by the adolescent audience' (7).*
28. For Clasen 2017: 4, this pleasure is an 'adaptive disposition',* whereby human beings enjoy the safe fictionality of negative emotions and dangerous experiences.
29. The text of the *Thyestes* follows Zwierlein (ed.) 1987.
30. The text of the *Thebaid* follows Hill (ed.) 1983, with reference to Shackleton-Bailey (ed.) 2003.
31. See Segal 1986: 331–6 for wider discussion. The *Thyestes* has also been read as combining horror and humour; see Meltzer 1988.
32. We could, for example, also discuss what we might call a whole response theory of horror, such as that articulated by Aldana Reyes (ed.) 2016: 7, wherein 'horror is largely defined by its affective pretences [and] takes its name . . . from the effects that it seeks to elicit in its readers', including not only the emotional responses of 'fear, shock or disgust (or a combination of these), alongside associated emotional states such as dread or suspense'* but also associated physiological reactions; this theory lacks the biological imperative of Lovecraft and Clasen. We might also profitably compare these views further with Cavarero 2009, especially in respect to the etymologies of terror and horror explored at pp. 4–9; see also n. 4. In her terror/horror dichotomy, Cavarero presents a similar picture to the views explored here but focuses the application of this distinction on what Carroll would call 'natural horror' rather than 'art horror'.
33. Clasen 2017: 48–9 also discusses disgust, although to a lesser extent than others.
34. See Miller 1997: 10–11 for a particularly strong framing of disgust as a universal emotion and Lateiner and Spatharas 2017: 4–7 for a recent discussion in the ancient context. For disgust as culturally mediated in psychological research, consider Angyal 1941, Izard 1971, Rozin and Fallon 1987, Rozin, Lowery and Ebert 1994, Miller 1997: 12–8, Rozin, Haidt and McCauley 1999; 2016, Miller 2004, Elwood and Olatunji 2009. While scholars have occasionally argued that certain elicitors of disgust are innate (see Rozin, Haidt and McCauley 2016: 816), fear tends to be more complicated. While some triggers are more obviously innately imbedded, others are mediated by socio-cultural factors or necessary knowledge; see Kreitler 2004, Scruton 1986.
35. With certain uses of such terms, one would also need to consider whether any kind of fear-based response is indeed present. In the case of *horror* itself and related vocabulary, for example, one would also encounter descriptions of physical 'roughness' or 'bristling' as well as bodily responses to an emotion other than fear. For a notable example of the latter, Adrastus' joy at solving the prophecy regarding his daughters' husbands is described as *horror* at Stat., *Thebaid* 1.493-4 (*laetusque per artus / horror iit*); Lewis and Short 1879 mark this as one of two examples of this usage. Estèves 2020: 30–115, discussed below, offers a close examination of fear-related vocabulary in Latin epic and historiography that observes such distinctions.
36. See Kaster 2001: 144–9 and 2005: 7–12 on the limitations of taking a lexical approach to the study of ancient emotions and the benefit of working with behavioural scripts. Whether the

audience/reader is intended to mirror the behaviour of certain characters in modern horror is the subject of debate, although it is a particularly popular interpretation of horror cinema; see Carroll 1990: 17–18, 27, Clover 1992/2005: 21–64, Cherry 2009: 128–40, Aldana Reyes 2016: 150–93.

37. Ganiban 2007: 50, n. 34 is particularly hesitant to call the *Thebaid* 'a modern work of horror' because Carroll and related theorists claim that modern horror functions based on 'the gradual revelation' of the horrifying object/being, whereas in Statius' text 'we learn of the terrible nature of the crimes that will be involved and those who will commit them from the start'.*
38. Specifically, Estèves conceives of horror primarily as a kind of 'hyperbolic fear' (*peur hyperbolique*). It may secondarily arise in conjunction with 'a sensation of visceral disgust or of panicked aversion' (*une sensation de dégoût viscéral ou de répulsion paniquée*, p. 21).* This secondary effect may bring to mind the dual-emotional aesthetic theories discussed above, but King remains the guiding focus of Estèves' analysis.
39. Especially prominent in Estèves' study is the distinction she draws throughout between *horror ad odium* and *horror ad uenerationem*, the first being a fear response generated from objects which are ugly or grotesque and the second representing a fear, akin to the sublime, evoked by stimuli associated with terrible beauty. Thinking alongside Ganiban 2007, it is also worth noting that Estèves does discuss *nefas* in her examination as relevant to the passages/devices under consideration, but it is not central to her analysis overall.
40. Kawin 2012, which takes on both King's theory of horror and the universality view present in the biological theory, offers another neat example of this pattern in a narrower study. In his discussion of horror's origins as a kind of 'nightmare', Kawin 2012: 3 only briefly references the *Epic of Gilgamesh* and *Odyssey* as ancient evidence of horror as a 'universal human experience'.* Dixon 2023: 1 also cites only these two texts following the claim that 'the origins of the horror story may be traced to the beginning of narrative itself',* jumping next in time to Dante's *Divine Comedy* of the early fourteenth century. Twitchell 1985: 4 offers 'Greek drama'* as the only ancient Mediterranean example in a short list of evidence for horror works before the nineteenth century, whereas Leffler 2000: 35 broadly mentions 'ancient classical . . . drama'*; Kawin 1986: 242 offers 'folklore, mythology, [and] classical tragedy (e.g. *Medea*, and though this may be stretching matters, *The Bacchae*)'* without further elaboration.
41. For a classicist's articulation of this view, see Estevès 2020: 16–17.
42. Consider, for example, the case presented by Weiner, Stevens and Rogers (eds) 2018 for the importance of a variety of ancient sources in the development of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus* (1818) and certain works it has inspired, or the associations that prompt Ogden 2021: 208 to conclude, 'It is fair to say, bearing in mind both the syntagmatic and the contextual relationships, that in antiquity werewolves inhabited the same conceptual space, the same story world, as sorcerers, witches, and ghosts, just as they do in the suite of the modern Hammer horror movies and their derivatives.'*

CHAPTER 2

HORROR IN THE *ODYSSEY*: A FEW NOTES ON LEODES' BEHEADING (22.326–9)

Giulia Maria Chesi

In the *Odyssey*, we do not find any comparable word to what we call today 'horror', although, notoriously, Odysseus' *Apologoi* abound with horrific scenes. In Book 10, the men-eating of Antiphates, the Laestrygonians' king, is merely described as the 'woeful destruction' (10.115: λυγρὸν ὄλεθρον) for Odysseus' companions. In Book 12, within yet another scene of anthropophagy, Scylla is said to engage the Greeks in an 'awful death struggle' (12.257: ἐν αἰνῇ δηιοτῆτι), which Odysseus depicts as the most sad episode he had to witness during his journey home (12.258–9); the sea monster, however, is nothing but an 'irreparable bane' (12.223: ἄπρηκτον ἀνίην). Charybdis, Scylla's 'companion', is the embodiment of a *deinos* being, i.e. a horrid creature (12.260, 430: δεινήν τε Χάρυβδιν), and her horrific agency extends to the maritime environment around her: when she sucks and regurgitates dark water terribly, *deinon* (12.104–6), the rocky sea stacks roar terribly, *deinon* (12. 240–2). Nonetheless, Charybdis is not just a dreadful monster. Like fair-haired Circe – a *deinos* goddess (10.136; 11.8: Κίρκη εὐπλόκαμος, δεινὴ θεὸς) – she is also divine (12.235: δῖα Χάρυβδις). Therefore, the adjective *deinos*, referring to Charybdis, also qualifies her as an awe-inspiring being arousing a feeling of venerable fear. Furthermore, in the same book, after Odysseus' companions have eaten the oxen of the god Helius, Odysseus recounts how the animals' skin began to crawl and how their pieces of meat upon the spits started bellowing (12.394–6). These events on the island of Thrinacia are explicitly said to constitute a horrific bane, *ainotaton kakon* (12.275). Yet, they are prodigious occurrences, *teraa*, sent by the gods (12.394).

To my knowledge, an exception to this is the occurrence of the verb *katastugeo* in Book 10. The Laestrygonians' Queen – we are told – is as huge as a mountain peak (10.113) – a narrative detail associating her with monstrosity[1]. Her gigantism arises repulsion in the Greeks and makes her a horrifying being (10.113: κατὰ δ᾽ ἔστυγον αὐτήν). Whereas the verb *stugeo* exceeds the semantic field of the noun 'horror' in English (first and foremost, it means 'to hate, to show hatred'), the compound verb *katastugeo* means 'to be horror-struck, to abhor' (cf. LSJ).[2] Yet, even in what is perhaps one of the most horrific scenes in the entire Homeric *epos* – that is, Polyphemus' anthropophagy in the so-called *Cyclopeia* – we search in vain for any word comparable to our term 'horror'. According to the cultural horizon of the Greeks, however, the Cyclops' man-eating undoubtedly represents a dreadful act, which causes the Greeks to fear and weep (10.198–202) and leaves Odysseus with a profound feeling of helplessness, *amechaniē* (9.295).[3] By eating Odysseus' companions limb by limb, Polyphemus acts as a beast: he embodies the brutal and gory violence of a mountain lion that devours the entrails, flesh and bones of its prey (9.291–3). The gloomy nexus between Polyphemus' anthropophagy and his use of violence emerges in Books 9 and 10. Here, terms pertaining to the semantic sphere of eating are juxtaposed to the noun *biē*, in this context clearly not 'heroic might' but 'brute violence':[4]

9.475–6: Κύκλωψ, οὐκ ἄρ᾽ ἔμελλες ἀνάλκιδος ἀνδρὸς ἑταίρους
ἔδμεναι ἐν σπῆϊ γλαφυρῷ κρατερῆφι **βίηφι**

Cyclops, you **did not devour** the companions of a man without strength by **brute violence** in the hollow cave

10.200: Κύκλωπός τε **βίης** μεγαλήτορος **ἀνδροφάγοιο**

and the **brute violence** of the greathearted Cyclops, the **man-eater**

The characterization of Polyphemus' meal as the horrid performance of feral violence is crucial to a critical assessment of Odysseus' killing of Leodes in Book 22. Leodes' beheading takes place during the massacre of Penelope's suitors. As we shall see, the gloomy meaning of Odysseus' vendetta is to be found in the image of the house turned into a slaughterhouse by the hero's rage. Yet, the textual interplay between the *Cyclopeia* and the *Mnesterophonia* urges us to ask whether Leodes' decapitation is the monstrous 'cyclopean' murder of an innocent man, or the heroic and legitimate punishment of an enemy. In this light, the *Odyssey* presents horror as a necessary category for revealing the ethical discourse of the poem; in other words, a notion which problematizes the separation between ethics and aesthetics.

Disembodied heads and heroic punishment

Leodes is the last of the suitors to die. When he is beheaded, his head rolls down on the floor while still speaking:

22.326–9: ὣς ἄρα φωνήσας ξίφος εἵλετο χειρὶ παχείῃ
κείμενον, ὅ ῥ᾽ Ἀγέλαος ἀποπροέηκε χαμᾶζε
κτεινόμενος: τῷ τόν γε κατ᾽ αὐχένα μέσσον ἔλασσε.
φθεγγομένου δ᾽ ἄρα τοῦ γε κάρη κονίῃσιν ἐμίχθη

So he spoke and seized in his sturdy hand a sword
that lay near, which Agelaus had let fall to the ground
when he was dying, and with this he hit him full in the neck,
he was still speaking when his head was mingled with the dust

Line 329 leaves no doubt that Leodes' head continues speaking as it is severed and falls to the ground. *Pace* Fernández-Galiano (CHO, *ad loc.*), the participle φθεγγομένου is not 'almost absolute': the pronoun τοῦ depends on κάρη. The particular of a 'disembodied head talking' is not a 'curious picture' (CHO, *ad loc.*). Line 329 also occurs in the *Iliad* (10.457), in the episode of Dolon's death, whom Diomedes beheads exactly the same way Odysseus decapitates Leodes, i.e. by driving a sword through his neck (*Il.* 10.455 = *Od.* 22.328: αὐχένα μέσσον ἔλασσε). In fact, in the Homeric epic, speech capabilities do not pertain exclusively to *living* creatures – whether animals or humans.[5] Artificial devices such as the golden maidens are endowed with language, *audē* (*Il.* 18.419), or, alternatively, are perceived as potentially being able to talk, see the Trojan horse[6] (*Od.* 4. 285–8); unburied dead can speak (see, for instance, the verbal exchange between Patroclus and Achilles in *Il.* 23.65–107 and between Elpenor and Odysseus in *Od.* 11.59–83); in the Underworld, the dead, after having drunk blood, are able to talk again (*Od.* 11.140–54); the pieces of meat of the sun's oxen strung on skewers can use their faculty of speaking, *phōnē* (*Od.* 12.396). What could reasonably be objected to is that the severed head of Leodes was not talking when it hit the ground but rather shouting. As Hainsworth observes in his commentary on *Il.* 10.457, 'Articulate speech is not in question in the Odyssean passage, and need not be foisted into it'. Yet, we need to be cautious. The seventeen occurrences of the verb *phtheggomai* in the Homeric epic certainly cover both meanings – that is, 'to shout, to scream, to utter a sound', as in *Od.* 9.497, where it is emphatically juxtaposed to *audāo* (εἰ δὲ **φθεγξαμένου** τευ ἤ **αὐδήσαντος** ἄκουσε / and had he heard one of us screaming or speaking); 'to speak', as in *Od.* 14.492–3, where Odysseus-the beggar, in his third false tale, recounts to Eumaeus how Odysseus in Troy told him to speak in a low voice so as not to be heard by the Achaeans.[7] Yet, the narrative context of the occurrence in the passage on Leodes' decapitation suggests to opting for the acceptation 'to speak'. Just before being beheaded, the sacrificing priest, *thuoskoos* (*Od.* 21.145; 22.318, 321), is not screaming but vainly begging Odysseus to save his life (*Od.* 22.312–19). There is another reason why it seems legitimate to assume that the severed head keeps speaking. As De Jong has pointed out, this gruesome detail is 'symbolic for this man, whose profession was to speak exegetical words'.[8] All this allows us to explore further the symbolic value of Leodes' punishment.

As is well known, Odysseus is the hero of *mētis* (cunning intelligence), which includes his dexterity in fabricating and handling technical objects (for instance, the raft and the marital bed), but also his mastery of language. A suitable example of Odysseus as the *polutropos* man, the man of many turns of speech,[9] is the linguistic pun *Outis* → *mē tis* → *mētis* in the *Cyclopeia* (9.366, 408–11). Before blinding the Cyclops, Odysseus gets Polyphemus drunk in order to make him fall asleep and attacks him by thrusting a spear in his eye with the help of his companions. While enjoying the Greek wine, Polyphemus asks Odysseus for his name in order to be able to reciprocate his offer with a *xeinion*, a stranger's gift (9.353–6). Odysseus' reply is: 'Nobody is my name' (9.366: **Οὖτις** ἐμοί γ' ὄνομα). The hero's notorious response functions as a technical-semantic *Selbstzerstörung*,[10] which paradoxically saves his life. Once blinded, Polyphemus' eye is dripping with blood (9.397), and the Cyclops cries so horribly that the rock all around produces a deep, loud sound (9.395: σμερδαλέον δὲ μέγ᾽ ᾤμωξεν, περὶ δ᾽ ἴαχε πέτρη); this alerts his fellow Cyclopes, who rush to help and ask who is trying to kill him (9.406). Polyphemus answers that 'Nobody' is killing him (9.408: ὦ φίλοι, **Οὖτίς** με κτείνει); the Cyclopes, then, suggest that he should pray to Poseidon, if nobody is harming him (9.410: εἰ μὲν δὴ **μή τίς** σε βιάζεται οἶον ἐόντα), and leave him alone. In the pun *mē tis/mētis* we recognize the denial of Odysseus' heroic identity: his heroic virtue of cunning (*mētis*) is referred to nobody (*mē tis*). Yet, given that elocution is one of Odysseus' heroic attributes and the head is perceived as an organ of communication in the Homeric poems (cf. Zeus' and Odysseus' nod in *Il*. 1.527–8; *Od*. 12.194), we can safely interpret Leodes' decapitation as Odysseus' violent attempt to deprive his enemy of the heroic ability to speak and, therefore, as a way to humiliate him.[11] After all, as one of the suitors of Penelope (*Od*. 21.148–51), Leodes offends Odysseus' *timē*; thus, within the heroic code of conduct in the world of the *Odyssey*, his death is a form of punishment fitting for his lack of respect for other people's honour.[12] In this light, it is hardly a random coincidence that Odysseus, in the dialogue exchange with Dolon shortly before Dolon's beading by Diomedes, is depicted precisely as *polymētis*, 'much shrewd and skilled' (*Il*. 10.423). This epithet of Odysseus occurs only nineteen times in the *Iliad* and, in Book 10, we find almost a third of the occurrences (6x).

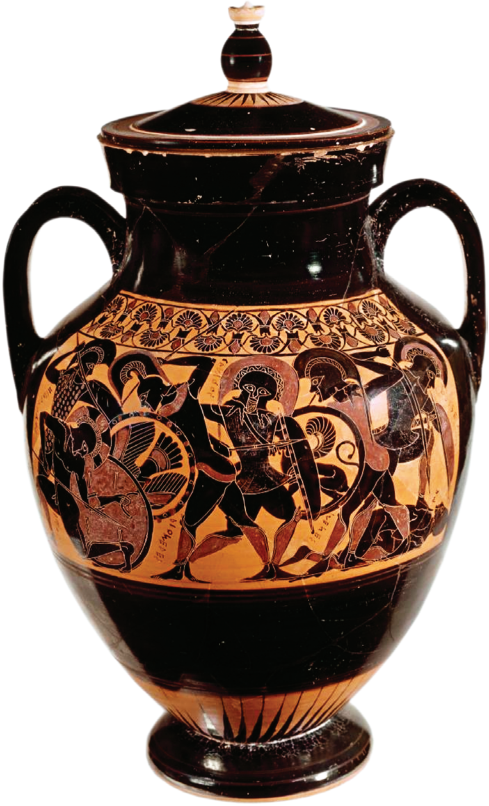

Figure 2.1 Ajax carrying the body of Achilles; Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Firenze, Inv. Nr. 4209.

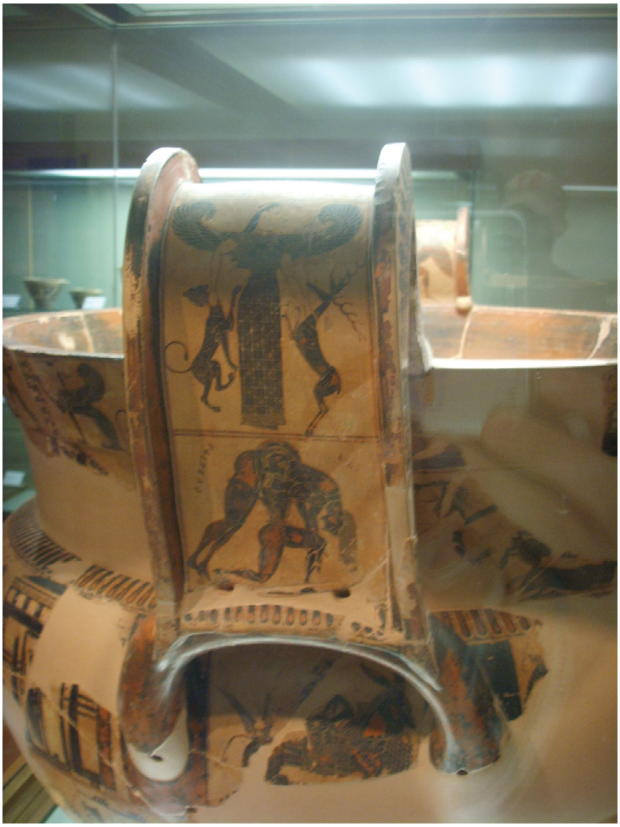

Figure 2.2 Side B, Battle scene during the Trojan War depicting Glaucus at the centre; National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Inv. Nr. 1643.a-b-D4.

By chopping off his head, Odysseus deprives Leodes also of another heroic attribute: beauty, i.e. the bodily expression of heroic value. As is well known, long, thick, curly and blond hair, in sharp contrast to baldness,[13] was one of the main traits of a heroic good look and, most importantly, a visual sign of prowess.[14] For instance, right at the beginning of the *Iliad*, the Achaeans are depicted as long-haired (2.323: κάρη κομόωντες Ἀχαιοί); in Book 3, in an extended dialogue with Helen on the Greek army, Priam claims that Odysseus is shorter than Agamemnon, but broader in the shoulders and chest and that he moves through the ranks of the Greeks like a thick-fleeced ram through a flock of sheep (3.192–8). This animal image evokes Odysseus' valour, but also serves as a reminder of his mane – thus, the ram has thick fur (3.197: ἀρνειῷ πηγεσιμάλλῳ). An animal image also emphasizes Paris' beauty and heroism. At the end of Book 6, when Paris strides down from Pergamus 'all shining in his armour like the sun', the primer narrator assimilates him to a well-fed and splendid stud waving his mane as he runs confidently towards the pastures (6.506–15). Seen this way, the motif of Leodes' head rolling on the ground is telling of the vulnerability of the hero's body and of the fragility of his short life. And indeed, it evokes the awful picture of Euphorbus' most beautiful hair drenched in blood when Menelaus kills him (*Il.* 17.46–52) and, similarly, the horrendous image of Hector's corpse being pulled by Achilles' chariot: his head, once so beautiful, *paros charien*, was hanging down and laying in the dust, and his mane 'flowed outspread', *pitnanto*, all around (22.401–3). Even more importantly, the disfigured beauty of Euphorbus and Hector, and, by analogy, that of Leodes, represents the loss of heroic identity. Once *kalos* (beautiful) and *agathos* (brave, courageous), now Hector, like Euphorbus and Leodes, is unrecognizable: to put it in Homeric terms, his deformed body has turned him into an *aeikelios* man, that is, a man who does not resemble anything.[15] Following Simone Weil on Hector's disfigured body in the Iliadic passage in question, Achilles' force, I quote:[16]

> . . . is that x that turns anybody who is subjected to it into a thing. Exercised to the limit, it turns man into a thing in the most literal sense: it makes a corpse out of him. *Somebody was here*, and the next minute *there is nobody here at all*.
>
> *italics mine*

In a similar vein, the image of Leodes' head rolling on the ground while still speaking is eloquent of the problematic character of Odysseus' violence: it reduces the priest to a thing. When his severed head will no longer speak, Leodes will be deprived of the last gasp that characterizes him as living flesh. Here, I am following closely Simone Weil:[17]

> If a stranger, completely disabled, disarmed, strengthless, throws himself on the mercy of a warrior, he is not, by this very act, condemned to death; but a moment of impatience on the warrior's part will suffice to relieve him of his life. In any case, *his flesh has lost that very important property which in the laboratory distinguishes living flesh from dead – the galvanic response*. If you give a frog's leg an electric shock, it twitches. If you confront a human being with the touch or sight of something horrible or terrifying, this bundle of muscles, nerves, and flesh likewise twitches.
>
> *italics mine*

It could be argued, then, that the death of Leodes is symptomatic of Odysseus' illegitimate violence. After all, the priest is committed to Odysseus' household since he hates the suitors and their foolishness (21.146–7); he is the first to try to string the bow (21.148), and yet he predicts that the other suitors will fail too and should marry another woman (21.153–61). We can stress this point even further and surmise that Odysseus has taken up the violence of Polyphemus. Just like Polyphemus refuses Odysseus' pleas for mercy and does not spare the Greeks (9.266–8, 277–8), so Odysseus does not accept Leodes' supplication and kills him; like Polyphemus dashes the Greeks to the ground, and their brains splash all around the cave (9.290, 458), similarly Odysseus cuts off Leodes' head which falls to the ground. In the *Mnesterophonia*, the polyphimic character of Odysseus’ violence perpetrated against Leodes is mirrored in the ghastly image of the house transformed into a slaughterhouse by the hero’s turn to uncontrollable violence: the hall is filled with a horrible groan, *stonos aeikēs* (22.308), dripping with steaming blood (22.309) and covered with corpses and infinite blood, *aspeton aima* (22.407).[18] The expression *stonos aeikēs* deserves attention. In depicting the suitors’ groaning as something heroic culture condemns as execrable and hideous, the primary narrator frames Odysseus’ violence in a discourse that goes well beyond the ideology of legitimate revenge.

Nonetheless, we should keep in mind that Leodes has made prophecies for the suitors (22.321), which he addresses as *philoi* (21.152), and that he is never said to have been forced to work for them. In addition, priests and seers are ambiguous characters in Greek culture. To name a few examples, roughly two generations after the Trojan War, a prophetess at Dodona gave a false oracle (Ephoros, *FGrH* 70 F 119 = Strabo 9.2.4); in the fourth century BCE, the priestess Nino, accused of leading a *thiasos* and, like the Lemnian priestess Theoris (Dem. 25.79), of practising magic, was finally sentenced to death (Dem. 39.2, 40.9; scholia ad Dem. 19.281). All this might explain the reason why Odysseus reproaches Leodes for his wrong deeds, although the priest maintains to have done nothing wrong and claims the righteousness of his actions (22.318–19) – for instance, he has never offended the female servants; quite the contrary, he had always done his best to persuade the suitors to respect them (22.313–16). Odysseus’ frustration at Leodes’ supplication emerges from this facial expression, ‘looking darkly’ (*Od*. 22.320: ὑπόδρα ἰδών = *Il*. 10.446, in the episode of Dolon’s death): dark looks, as Holoka has extensively shown, ‘signal irritation and resentment and are meant to stop short an offender against social decorum’.*[19] On the one side, from Odysseus’ perspective, the priest Leodes must have prayed on behalf of his *philoi*-suitors that Odysseus would have never returned to Ithaca (22.321–3); on the other side, the suitor Leodes must have wanted to marry Penelope and have children with her (22.324). In fact, Leodes himself acknowledges his desire for Penelope; when he is about to string the bow without success, he states that it is better to die than to fail that for the sake of which he and the suitors gather in Odysseus’ house each passing day (21.154–6).

As an avenging hero, then, Odysseus has to restore his honour *at all costs*:[20] all the 108 suitors are killed, regardless of their good conduct, or lack thereof. In line with the uncompromising dimension of Odysseus’ revenge, only the life of those who are *not* suitors is spared. Notoriously, encouraged by his son Telemachus, Odysseus refrains from recklessly killing the herald Medon and the singer Phemius (22.344–80). The only exception to this is the killing of Melanthius during the *Mnesterophonia*. Yet, the goatherd is executed because of his close association with the suitors: in Books 21 and 22, he helps the suitors to string the bow (21.175–85) and arms them in the battle against the hero (22.135–46, 160–6). As Strauss Clay has remarked, Melanthius’ fellowship with the suitors is well expressed by the narrative detail of the instrument of his death, that is, the sword of the fallen suitor Agelaos (22.327–8).[21]

The modality of Odysseus’ violence against Leodes is in support of this reading. To be sure, as Dué and Ebbot carefully explain (2010: 356–7), although the practice of beheading the enemy might appear appalling to the modern reader, in the Homeric battle, it epitomizes the warriors' prowess: it takes place – I quote – 'one day following this night, when the fighting is most intense and the stakes at their highest for the Achaeans'. In an elaborate article, McClellan has argued that the beheading of Imbrius by the Locrian Ajax in the *Iliad* (13.201–5) testifies to decapitation as a loathsome mode of execution:[22] the image of Imbrius' head rolling on the ground like a ball (13.204: *sphairēdon*)[23] and stopping at Hector's feet exemplifies the atrocity of Ajax's violence. Yet, Imbrius' decapitation occurs *post mortem*, and therefore, strictly speaking, represents the despicable act of mutilation of a corpse, just like the beheading of the fallen Coön by Agamemnon (*Il.* 11.260–1). There is more. In his beseeching address to Odysseus, Phemius uses the same supplication formula as Leodes:

> 22.344: γουνοῦμαί σ᾽, Ὀδυσεῦ: σὺ δέ μ᾽ αἴδεο καί μ᾽ ἐλέησον
>
> I implore you, Odysseus: respect me and have pity

This is not a minor detail. When Leodes begs Odysseus with the words 'γουνοῦμαί σ᾽, Ὀδυσεῦ: σὺ δέ μ᾽ αἴδεο καί μ᾽ ἐλέησον', he is repeating *expressis verbis* Lycaon's attempted supplication to Achilles shortly before being beheaded (*Il.* 21.122). As Di Bendetto points out, in the context of the couple Leodes–Lycaon, the repetition emphasizes the cruelty of Odysseus, while 'it gives Odysseus the occasion for an act of humanity' in the context of the couple Phemius–Leodes.[24] We see how Odysseus' violence is not indiscriminate. Unlike Polyphemus, for whom man-eating becomes a 'domestic routine'[25] marked in the text by the same formulaic diction,[26] Odysseus controls his drive to kill. Even more importantly, the hero provides the audience/the readers with an explanation of his choice to save the life of Phemius: 'doing good is much better than doing harm' (22.374: κακοεργίης εὐεργεσίη μέγ᾽ ἀμείνων). Regardless of how trivial this statement may seem, it is revealing of a fundamental difference between Polyphemus and Odysseus: gratuitous recourse to violence is characteristic of the monster, not of the hero. Despite his representation as a bloodthirsty and pitiless avenger of his opponents – first among all Leodes – Odysseus is *agathos* because he is able to discern between what is good and what is wrong.[27]

Conclusions

Within the Greek literary tradition, what is perceived as horrific strictly depends on the ethical-political structure of the society in which it occurs. As we have seen, in the world of Odysseus, where heroic virtue is eminently competitive and, conversely, where there is still no system of laws controlling disputes, but only the inescapable necessity to avenge the offended honour,[28] beheading does not constitute a hideous method of killing; quite the contrary, it is a gory symbol of the exceptionality of heroic violence. Specifically, as we have seen, Leodes' decapitation has a symbolic meaning. It deprives the priest of his heroic attributes: on the one side, the faculty of speaking; on the other side, bodily beauty, which mirrors courage. Yet, with the transition from a revenge society to a *dikē*-society, decapitation becomes a gruesome form of punishment: in tragedy, for example, decapitation constitutes an atrocity comparable to the *sparagmos* (cf. *Eum*. 186–97; *Bacch*. 241). Seen this way, for the modern reader, the beheaded body of Leodes acts as a visual reminder that our body is first and foremost our social self: bodily punishment reflects the violence that underlies the system of values, and the norms that regulate it, of the society in which we live. This might answer the question Sotera Fornaro addresses in *Che cos'è un classico*?: 'Il pensiero è grottesco: perché mai qualcuno in futuro dovrebbe interessarsi di quei fatti?'[29]

Notes

1. See, for instance, Polyphemus. In the eyes of the narrator Odysseus, the Cyclops is an aberrant creature: he is so enormous, *pelōrios* (9.190), that he resembles a wooded mountain peak (9.192). All translations are by Murray, slightly modified. The Greek of the *Odyssey* follows the OCT edition by Allen.
2. Accordingly, the corresponding substantive – *to stugēma* – terms an abominable thing, which is an object of hatred (cf. LSJ).
3. Fear and tears are also the Greeks' emotional reactions to Scylla's and the Laestrygonians' horrendous men-eating in 10.133 and 12.271, 309-11.
4. Cf. Chesi 2018: 3.
5. See Xanthus who predicts his death to Achilles (*Il*. 19.404–17) and Odysseus' companions, transformed into pigs by Circe, who are said to have a porcine *phōnē* (*Od*. 10.239). On the talking Xanthus, see the groundbreaking work of Johnston (1992); on animal speech in Greek literature, see e.g. Furlanetto 2005: 158–63; Fögen 2014: 219–23.
6. On the Trojan horse as a talking device, see Chesi 2024.
7. φθεγξάμενος δ᾽ ὀλίγῃ ὀπί με πρὸς μῦθον ἔειπε/σίγα νῦν, μή τίς σευ Ἀχαιῶν ἄλλος ἀκούσῃ / 'and speaking in a low voice he said to me/ Be silent now, lest another of the Achaeans hear you.'. Specifically, on *audē* in Homeric language see Strauss Clay 1974.
8. Cf. De Jong 2001: 538.
9. Since antiquity, there is a controversial debate on the meaning of the epithet *polutropos* (*Od*. 1.1; 10.330); on its meaning 'of many turns of speech', cf. e.g. the memorable musing in Pucci 1982: 53–5.
10. On Odysseus' *Selbstzerstörung* in the *Cyclopeia*, cf. the discussion of Horkheimer and Adorno's in the second chapter of *Die Dialektik der Aufklärung* ('Excursus I: Odysseus oder der Mythos der Aufklärung'), on which Chesi 2015.
11. See Cantarella 1996: 32, 59–60.
12. For the respect of other people's *timē* as a social obligation, cf. e.g. *Od*. 8.480; 22.414–15; 23.65–6.
13. See e.g. Thersites in *Il*. 2.218–19 and Odysseus whom Athena transforms into an old and hideous beggar in *Od*. 13.398–400.
14. For passages in the *Odyssey* see, for instance, Book 6 (230–1) and Book 23 (157–8). In these beautification scenes at Scheria and Ithaca, Athena embellishes Odysseus' hair, making it similar to the hyacinth flower. For iconographic representations, see e.g. the François Vase

(Figure 2.1) and the psykter amphora at the National Gallery of Victoria (Figure 2.2). As Grundmann 2019: 218, 230–2 has extensively shown, the Homeric representation of the head of hair as a bodily symbol of warlike heroism returns in Herodotus' *Histories*, e.g. the passages in Book I 82,7f. (within the account of the Spartans' war against Thyrea) and in Book VII 176, 6 (in the context of the description of the battle of Thermopylae).

15. On the adjective *agathos* as relating in Homeric language to martial prowess see Adkins 1997: 702. On the semantics of *agathos* in Homeric Greek see below n. 27. On the Greek notion of *kalokagathia* see e.g. the reference work of Bourriot 1995 and, more recently, Dürrigl 2003 and Nikityuk 2019. For this specific translation of the Homeric 'aeikelios' see Vernant 1996: 388–90.
16. Cf. Weil 1956: 3.
17. Ibid.: 6.
18. For Leodes as victim of Odysseus' brutal and polyphimic violence, cf. also Buchan 2004: 176–9; Brelinski 2015: 6–7; Grethlein 2017: 221. On Odysseus' polyphimic violence against the suitors, cf. Loney 2019: ch. 4, esp. 175–80, 182–3.
19. Cf. Holoka 1983: 4.
20. See the pioneering work of Eva Cantarella on Homeric vendetta (e.g. 1996: 19, 34 and, more recently, 2014: 99–102); Vegetti 1989: 19. Accordingly, I differ from Gould 1973: 81: 'The rejection, like those of Adrastus and Lycaon, is justified by the need for vengeance: but in this case there is nothing in the ritual procedures to mitigate the act or by casuistry to exculpate Odysseus.'* In fact, in Leodes' bid for mercy from Odysseus, one can point to the matter of fact that he does not 'claim the god's protection in order to strengthen his plea'* (Pedrick 1982: 134, with n. 38 for Homeric references); this ritual deviation is particularly striking considering Leodes' status as a sacrificing priest.
21. Cf. Strauss Clay 1994: 38.
22. Cf. McClellan 2016: 164ff. .
23. Cf. the death of Hippolochos: Agamemnon kills him by shearing off his arms and chopping his neck and makes him **roll** like a **round stone** amid the throng (*Il*. 11.146–7: χεῖρας ἀπὸ ξίφεϊ τμήξας ἀπό τ᾽ αὐχένα κόψας/**ὅλμον** δ᾽ ὣς ἔσσευε **κυλίνδεσθαι** δι᾽ ὁμίλου).
24. Cf. Di Benedetto 2001: 9; 2010: *ad loc*.
25. Cf. Clare 2000: 14.
26. 'Then, when he had busily performed his tasks, again he seized two men at once and made ready his meal' (9.311–44: σὺν δ᾽ ὅ γε δὴ αὖτε δύω μάρψας ὡπλίσσατο δεῖπνον).
27. On *agathos* in the Homeric epic in the specific meaning of 'good at, capable of', cf. Vegetti 1989: 16–17.
28. See Vegetti 1989: 29–32.
29. Fornaro 2013: 50.

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CHAPTER 3

THE VISCERAL THRILLS OF TRAGEDY: FLESH, BLOOD AND GUTS *OFF* AND *ON* THE TRAGIC STAGE

Evina Sistakou

In a well-known sequence from Stanley Kubrick's film *The Shining*, the protagonist, Jack Torrance, addresses his wife during a scene of heightened tension, when he attacks her against the background of a huge staircase in a deserted hotel in the Rocky Mountains. Despite the ironic twist of language and the black humour inherent in Jack's utterance, the sense conveyed to the spectators is that of horror. Spectators are invited to share the horrific experiences of a family trapped in a claustrophobic (literally *bloody*) setting where violence is constantly threatening its members like an axe hanging over their heads. The ensuing horror effect heightens the spectators' emotional response and, not least, their pleasure in watching the fear and pain of Jack's wife and their underage boy in the face of their slaughtering. Although in the end the innocent victims escape the protagonist's mania and survive, the torrents of blood and the other graphic imagery dominating the film haunt the imagination of the spectators much more powerfully and persistently than the actual outcome of the plot. After all, who remembers the 'happy ending' of the film?[1]

Leaving aside the cultural and aesthetic divide between this iconic horror film and Greek tragedy, not to mention the historical and performative gap separating them,[2] one should not undermine some striking similarities: the recurring theme of a family trapped within a secluded space whose members face agonizing death; the atmosphere of extreme suffering and the climactic eruption of violence; the overuse of blood in language and imagery; the overarching sense that bloodshed is imminent; the profound effect on the spectators who experience pleasure in empathizing with the horrors of the fictional characters.[3] Greek tragedy is a genre contingent on the representation of violence,[4] followed in most cases by death in all its physical forms: murder, suicide, killing in the family (patricide, matricide, filicide, fratricide), human sacrifice, martyric death, killing on the battlefield . . . the list is endless.[5] Death by murder was considered to be polluting for the polis and its citizens, hence it should not to be presented onstage; however, multiple deaths occur in each and every Greek tragedy, whereas their representation is mostly verbal, assigned to a messenger.[6] And although 'blood' was also thought to be polluting, it is not an exaggeration to claim that, like the set of Kubrick's *The Shining* which is dominated by the iconic red carpet, the stage of the Greek theatre was, metaphorically at least, flooded with blood.

Horror is usually associated with contemporary fiction and film, artistic media that aim at mass sensation. But horror aesthetics has a longer history that can be traced back to antiquity. Of all literary genres, Greek tragedy abounds with manifestations of horror, as the term is understood in its modern-day contexts.[7] Since Aristotle's celebrated treatise on tragedy, the emotional aspects of tragic theatre, the pity and fear generated in the spectators, were considered a defining factor of its generic identity. A clear parallel is offered by the horror genre as it has developed from Gothic literature to twentieth-century film, since again an emotion, 'horror', lies at the core of its artistic philosophy. This 'art-emotion', a hybrid of fear, awe and disgust, is also found in Greek tragedy, and, as argued by Aristotle, also triggers a physical, biological response to those experiencing it. Moreover, tragic plots have a lot in common with horror plots, in the sense that both arouse emotions of fear and empathy, while at the same time these extreme emotions engender pleasure in their viewers (or readers): the tragic paradox reappears as horror paradox.[8]

To reinforce the parallelism between horror film and Greek tragedy one must consider another essential component of both, namely the centrality of the body in the suffering, alias the *pathos*, of the struggling human characters.[9] The suffering body is a standard space of the tragic plot and staging, a space engendering extreme emotions to the audience. The power of this feature is also acknowledged by Aristotle (*Poet.* 1452b.11–13): alongside 'reversal' (*peripeteia*) and 'recognition' (*anagnorisis*), 'suffering' (*pathos*) denotes 'a destructive or powerful action, e.g. deaths in full view, agonies, woundings and the like' (trans., modified, R. Janko). Although the two former components are related to the plot, the third, namely suffering, may function on the level of both plot and performance.[10] Given the unrealistic, ritualistic context of Greek theatre that in some respects evokes contemporary performative experiences (an extreme example of ritual-based theatre is the Japanese Noh theatre, and, in the West, Antonin Artaud's 'Theatre of Cruelty' highlighting sensuality and corporeality), it is explicable why the body was widely thematized and variously visualized in Greek tragedy.[11] Even if the details surrounding the scenic presentation of the body on the Athenian stage elude us, the surviving tragic plays offer ample evidence for its theatrical exploitation. The dead bodies demonstrated on the *ekkyklema* which are prominent in the trilogy of the *Oresteia*, the body of the Titan Prometheus who was bound and tortured onstage throughout the pseudo-Aeschylean play, the centrality of the colossal body of Ajax in Sophocles' tragedy which is first killed by the hero's own sword and then left exposed on the stage, the prolonged corporeal suffering of Heracles in Sophocles' *Trachiniae*, the languishing body of Phaedra in *Hippolytus* and the mutilated body of Pentheus in the *Bacchae* are some the most celebrated examples of this deep-rooted tradition of Greek tragedy.[12]

In what follows I will discuss passages from all three tragedians that depict bodies disintegrating into their components (blood, flesh and guts), bodies mutilated or dismembered, bodies melting after poisoning or suffering extreme physical *pathos* – what I call 'the horrific bodies'. Tragedy abounds with such bodies, either in explicit descriptions or integrated into metaphoric language and imagery; however, it is in the messenger speeches that the most extreme presentations of horrific bodies are to be found. In addition to the verbal representations, tragedy also exploited visual means to put horrific bodies on display. As is the case with modern horror too, the spectator in the ancient theatre was invited to conceptualize horror through words and then to experience it through vision, in effect to alternate between imaginary and materialized horror and thus to perceive it through mental and sensory processes. The present study will eventually bring up the controversial question about the effect of tragic horror: did tragic horror relate to the 'pity-and-fear' theory introduced by Aristotle, did it aim to strike with awe and amazement and/or did it trigger a pleasurable emotional response in ancient spectators?[13]

The horrific bodies and their components

What has survived from Greek tragedy are the texts, so inferences regarding the recurrent themes are based on textual evidence and only secondarily on other testimonies about their performative aspects. Even a superficial reading of the extant tragedies sheds light on the thematic and stylistic divergences of the three tragedians, and the subject of 'horror' is no exception to this rule. Hence, the title 'blood, flesh and guts' reflects the marked preference of the great classical playwrights of tragedy for one of these 'components' of the horrific bodies. I argue that this is just a general trend connected to the style and thematic emphases of each playwright and does not describe their horror aesthetics overall. Although blood is central in the horrific scenes of all Greek tragedies, it is Aeschylus' plays, especially their imagery and language, that are literally splattered with it;[14] the body and its sufferings are particularly relevant to the *pathos* of Sophocles' heroes,[15] hence flesh is of central importance in his plays; finally, Euripides systematically explores the anatomical details of the suffering body, what I collectively term 'the guts', to create sensational effects. Evidently, this is a rough generalization that ignores the subtlety and complexity of the plots, staging and language of the tragic plays. It is nevertheless useful, because it helps us highlight specific patterns in the visualization of horror and subsequently trace a gradual change in the horror aesthetics of the three tragedians.

Aeschylus might well have been the inventor of gothic horror *ante litteram*, a trend that is reflected in the theatrical exploitation of dreams, madness and family curses, the setting of the claustrophobic edifice that traps its inhabitants, and, of course, the hair-raising appearance of ghosts and the Furies in his plays. All these motifs are intertwined in the making of the *Oresteia* trilogy. Yet, if there is one returning image that haunts the characters and the audiences of the *Oresteia*, this is the image of blood in a cycle of unremitting slaughter. Looming in the background is the bloody sacrifice of Iphigeneia by her own father, king Agamemnon: the Chorus in the parodos introduces the horror of ritual human/animal sacrifice and the resultant bloodbath, an image typically allegorizing murder in Greek tragedy (160–257).[16] The vocabulary of blood is also used by Agamemnon, the general who returns from the Trojan bloodshed (813–16: θεοὶ/ κλυόντες ἀνδροθνῆτας Ἰλιοφθόρους/ εἰς αἱματηρὸν τεῦχος οὐ διχορρόπως/ ψήφους ἔθεντο and 827–8: ὑπερθορὼν δὲ πύργον ὠμηστὴς λέων/ ἄδην ἔλειξεν αἵματος τυραννικοῦ). The prophetess Cassandra, upon entering the household, conjures up the bloody past of the *genos* of Atreus (1085–97):

> Cassandra: Apollo, Apollo !
> Lord of the streets, my destroyer!
> Oh where, wherever have you led me? To what kind of house?
>
> Chorus: To that of the Atreidai. If you do not realize this,
> I am telling you, and you will not call it false.
>
> Cassandra: No – to a godless house, with much on its conscience –
> evil bloodshed by kin (αὐτοφόνα κακά), carving like meat –
> a place for slaughtering men (ἀνδροσφαγεῖον), a floor sprinkled with blood
> (πέδον ῥαντήριον)!
>
> Chorus: The stranger has a keen nose it seems, like a hound;
> she is searching for blood and will discover whose murder it was.
>
> Cassandra: – because I put my trust in evidence here:
> these are infants weeping for their slaughter (σφαγάς),
> and over their roasted flesh (ὀπτάς τε σάρκας) which their father devoured.
>
> *Trans. Ch. Collard*

This is only the prelude to the prophetic frenzy of Cassandra, notorious for the horrific visions it entails. How Thyestes ate his own children who were murdered and served to him by his brother Atreus (1215–22), how Agamemnon and Cassandra will be brutally murdered (1246–78) and how eventually their murder will be repaid with the slaughter of Aegisthus and the matricide of Clytemnestra (1279–90). Blood runs through Cassandra's speech, when she realizes that the house of Agamemnon is imbued with ancestral blood (1189: βρότειον αἷμα κῶμος ἐν δόμοις μένει and 1309: φόνον δόμοι πνέουσιν αἱματοσταγῆ) and that she is destined to spill her own blood there (1278: θερμῷ κοπείσης φοίνιον προσφάγματι and 1293–4: αἱμάτων εὐθνησίμων/ ἀπορρυέντων).[17] Probably the most sensational metaphor is that of Clytemnestra delighting in the rain of Agamemnon's gushing blood (1388–92):

> Clytemnestra: [Agamemnon] gasps out quickly blood from his throat-wound (ὀξεῖαν αἵματος σφαγὴν) and hits me with a dark shower of gory dew (βάλλει μ᾽ ἐρεμνῇ ψακάδι φοινίας δρόσου), and I rejoice no less than a sown crop does in Zeus' sparkling gift when the sheathed ears swell for birth.
>
> *Trans. Ch. Collard*

Leaving aside for now the visual side of Aeschylus' bleeding stage, it is obvious that the discourse of his characters is 'bleeding' as well.[18] The telling example is the *Agamemnon* where the word αἷμα and its derivatives (αἱμάς, αἱματίς, αἱματόεις, αἱματηρός, αἱματοσταγής, αἱματολοιχός, αἱματόω, αἱματάω) occur dozens of times, alongside vocabulary denoting slaughter (σφαγή, φόνος, φοίνιος, cf. the compound words ἀνδροσφαγεῖον, παρθενόσφαγος, αὐτοφόνος, πολυκτόνος, ἀνδρολέτειρα, δολόφονος) and the crimson colour in general (πορφύρα, πορφυρόστρωτος, μέλας, ἐρεμνός), or suggesting the drinking and licking of blood (αἱματολοιχός, ἔλειξεν αἵματος τυραννικοῦ, πεπωκὼς … βρότειον αἷμα). The same-themed vocabulary and imagery pervades the other two plays of the trilogy. It is characteristic of Aeschylean horror that at the closure of the *Choephoroi* the Furies are depicted as 'dripping blood from their eyes' (1058: κἀξ ὀμμάτων στάζουσιν αἷμα δυσφιλές) and in the opening verses of the *Eumenides* Orestes is described as a killer with bloodied hands (41–3: αἵματι/ στάζοντα χεῖρας καὶ νεοσπαδὲς ξίφος/ ἔχοντα).[19] The *Oresteia* abounds with words related to blood and slaughter which relocate the 'aesthetics of horror' from the actions of the characters to their verbal expression. Thus, Aeschylean language overflows with the horrors of its protagonists.[20]

Moving on to Sophocles, the body/flesh vocabulary and imagery emerge as a recurrent means to articulate tragic horror.[21] The human body dominates the Sophoclean stage, and hence πάθος 'suffering', in Aristotle's understanding of the notion, shapes the verbal and visual configuration of Sophocles' plays. Death is omnipresent verbally and/or visually, most prominently in the numerous Sophoclean suicides either by the sword (Ajax, Haemon and Deianeira) or by hanging (Antigone, Jocasta).[22] Self-injury and torture are also a recurrent motif in Sophocles' plays, especially the two Oedipus plays and *Antigone*.[23] The suffering body forms the core of his surviving tragedies: in *Antigone* the corpse of Polyneices becomes the driving force behind the plot; in the *Ajax* the dispute over the protagonist's dead body and its burial becomes the focus of the last part of the play; in *Philoctetes* the hero wastes away overwhelmed by a stinking wound and a crippling leg; in the two Oedipus tragedies the fall of the king symbolically translates into his metamorphosis to the pathetic figure of a blind old man; in the *Electra* it is the slaughtered body of Clytemnestra that concludes the play; the revenge of Deianeira in the *Trachiniae* is executed through the use of the poisonous robe that eats away the flesh of Heracles.

Taking the latter as an exemplary case, it is worth highlighting how the horrors of the flesh are anticipated by the description of the murder weapon itself, namely the robe.[24] The robe that is eaten by itself because of the blood of Nessus is a metaphor for Heracles' suffering later in the play (674–8 and 697–702):

> DEIANEIRA: The tuft of white wool from a fleecy sheep with which I smeared that stately robe just now, has vanished – not consumed by anything (διάβορον πρὸς οὐδενὸς) within the house; no, self-devoured (ἐδεστὸν ἐξ αὑτοῦ φθίνει) it crumbled down from the stone it lay on.
>
> ……………………………………………………………
>
> As it warmed, it melted away to nothing (ῥεῖ πᾶν ἄδηλον), crumbling into earth exactly like the little particles of sawdust (πρίονος ἐκβρώματα) which we see when trees are leveled. It lies there still. And from the place it fell a curdled clot of bubbling foam seethed up (ἀναζέουσι θρομβώδεις ἀφροί) …
>
> *Trans. R. Torrance*

The melting and self-pulverizing fabric of the robe evokes a marvellous act of magic. But soon this fairy-tale imagery will be replaced by physical horror, once the hero is eaten alive by the poisonous robe.[25] In the subsequent scene the consuming of Heracles' flesh is described in graphic detail by Hyllus (763–82):[26] the garment blazes up with a bloody flame (φλὸξ αἱματηρὰ) that causes his flesh to sweat (ἱδρὼς ἀνῄει χρωτὶ) and then it is glued to his body (προσπτύσσετο πλευραῖσιν ἀρτίκολλος); the poison devours his joints and bones (ἅπαν κατ᾽ ἄρθρον … ὀστέων ὀδαγμὸς ἀντίσπαστος); then a spasm clutches his lungs (διώδυνος σπαραγμὸς αὐτοῦ πλευμόνων); finally his white brain flows between his hair (κόμης δὲ λευκὸν μυελὸν ἐκραίνει) and his head is split open (μέσου κρατὸς διασπαρέντος) soaked in blood (αἵματός θ᾽ ὁμοῦ). In a reprise of the scene Heracles himself declares that he has been defeated by a piece of cloth (1052: ὑφαντὸν ἀμφίβληστρον, ᾧ διόλλυμαι), which has attacked his flesh and blood and thus has annihilated his body (1053–7):[27]

> HERACLES: Glued to my sides (πλευραῖσι γὰρ προσμαχθὲν), it eats my flesh away deep down within (ἐκ μὲν ἐσχάτας βέβρωκε σάρκας), and dwells inside my lungs (πλεύμονός τ᾽ ἀρτηρίας) choking my breath: already it has drunk my fresh warm blood (ἐκ δὲ χλωρὸν αἷμα) and wasted my whole body (διέφθαρμαι δέμας), binding me with unutterable chains.
>
> *Trans. R. Torrance*

In this sequence horror is first *anticipated* (verbally and probably materially by the prop of the robe), then *narrated* (as an offstage event) and finally visually *displayed* (by the victim itself): in all three instances the flesh becomes the focal point of the body in pain.[28]

The body functions as a symbol of suffering and sacrifice on the stage of Sophocles, who, due to his understanding of human *pathos*, refrains from turning his plays into mere phantasmagorias of horror. However, Euripides seems to be more susceptible to the graphic representation of the horrific body. Horror *tableaux* in Euripides' plays, although mostly visualized in the spectator's mind, derive from all forms of physical violence, including homicide, human sacrifice, poisoning, blinding, mutilation and dismemberment.[29] Since the theatrical means available to fifth-century BCE tragedians were evidently limited and hence 'splatter' scenes could not be visualized onstage, a great deal of Euripidean horror is channelled into the discourse of his characters, and especially in the gory descriptions of violent acts in messenger speeches.[30] Euripidean messenger speeches are quite extensive, whereas the narration slows down once the messenger nears the horrific moment; then time freezes and graphic description takes over thus evoking the form of a film sequence.

In the *Medea* the murdering of Glauce develops in a sequence of consecutive shots: the epileptic crisis with the white foam coming from her mouth and the rolling of her eyes (1167–80), the double attack by the robe that devours her flesh and the golden crown that sets her head and hair ablaze (1185–94), the melting off of the flesh from her skull and bones (1197–201) and finally the struggling of her corpse with Creon, expressed again through the imagery of the devouring *peplos* (1211–19).[31] Structured in sequences is also the messenger description in the *Heracles*, where the murderer, the hero himself, first has a seizure of madness, illustrated by the foam at the mouth and the rolling of the eyes (930–4), and then kills his three children and wife with a bow (977–1000): one arrow penetrates the entrails of the first son (πρὸς ἧπαρ 'liver or heart'), another the skull of the second child (καθῆκε παιδὸς ἐς ξανθὸν κάρα,/ ἔρρηξε δ᾽ ὀστᾶ), whereas a third pierces together the mother and the last son (δάμαρτα καὶ παῖδ᾽ ἑνὶ κατέστρωσεν βέλει).[32] Human sacrifice is the focus of the messenger scene in the *Hecuba*, where Neoptolemus slaughters Polyxena by slitting her throat and spilling her blood on the tomb of Achilles (519–70, esp. 568–9: τέμνει σιδήρῳ πνεύματος διαρροάς / κρουνοὶ δ᾽ ἐχώρουν). The tragedy ends with another bloodshed, narrated by the victim itself, the king Polymestor, of how Hecuba and the Trojan maidens fiercely attacked him and blinded him with their brooches (1145–75). Notoriously gory is the messenger scene from the *Bacchae* (1113–47), depicting the *sparagmos* of Pentheus by the maenads who tear him apart piece by piece (ἀπεσπάραξεν ὦμον, ῥηγνῦσα σάρκας, ἔφερε δ᾽ ἡ μὲν ὠλένην, γυμνοῦντο δὲ πλευραὶ σπαραγμοῖς, διεσφαίριζε σάρκα Πενθέως) and eventually his decapitation (κεῖται δὲ χωρὶς σῶμα . . . κρᾶτα δ᾽ ἄθλιον); the play concludes with the uncanny snapshot of Agave carrying her son's bloodied head on a *thyrsos* (1202–10).[33]

Among these blood and gore descriptions, the messenger account of the fratricide between Eteocles and Polyneices and the subsequent suicide of Jocasta from the *Phoenissae* (1335–479) form the most extensive scene of Euripidean horror. Following the bipartite messenger speech narrating the fall of the seven leaders in the battle against Thebes (1067–199) and the preparation for the duel between Eteocles and Polyneices (1200–83), which creates an atmosphere of martial violence by echoing the Iliadic *androktasiae*, the duel between the two brothers is a striking example of graphic horror.[34] The duellers, likened to frenzied boars (1380–1: κάπροι δ᾽ ὅπως θήγοντες ἀγρίαν γένυν / ξυνῆψαν, ἀφρῶι διάβροχοι γενειάδας), aim with their spears at vital parts of their opponent's body first the eyes and mouth (1384–5: εἰ δ᾽ ὄμμ᾽ ὑπερσχὸν ἴτυος ἅτερος μάθοι, / λόγχην ἐνώμα στόματι προφθῆναι θέλων) and then the knee (1394: κνήμην τε διεπέρασεν Ἀργεῖον δόρυ), shoulder and breast (1396–8: γυμνὸν ὦμον εἰσιδὼν/ ὁ πρόσθε τρωθεὶς στέρνα Πολυνείκους βίαι/ διῆκε λόγχην). The duel culminates in a scene of iconographic horror (1409–22):

> Messenger: Eteocles, disengaging himself from the immediate contest, drew back his left foot but kept his eye closely on the pit of the other's stomach (τὰ κοῖλα γαστρὸς) from a distance; then advancing his right foot he plunged the weapon through his navel (δι᾽ ὀμφαλοῦ καθῆκεν ἔγχος) and fixed it in his spine (σφονδύλοις τ᾽ ἐνήρμοσεν). Down fell Polyneices, dripping with blood (σὺν αἱματηραῖς σταγόσι), ribs and belly (πλευρὰ καὶ νηδὺν) contracting in his agony. But the other, thinking his victory now complete, threw down his sword and began to despoil him, wholly intent on that, without a thought for himself. And this indeed tripped him up; for Polyneices, who had fallen first, was still faintly breathing and having in his grievous fall kept his sword, he made a last effort and drove it through the heart (ἐξέτεινε δ᾽ εἰς ἧπαρ ξίφος) of Eteocles.
>
> *Trans. E. P. Coleridge*

All the features of Euripidean horror are incorporated here, such as the focus on anatomical details, the visceral intensity of the description, the combination of medical accuracy and vivid imagery, the conception of the body through its parts, and hence its fragmentation. Moreover, what this passage amply demonstrates is the quasi cinematic approach underlying Euripidean slaughtering scenes, with the suspenseful pacing, the emphasis on closeups and the use of montage-like techniques within the horror sequence. It is to the visual presentation of the horrific bodies through theatrical means and its effect on spectators that I will now turn my attention.

Visual horror and its visceral thrills

It appears that Greek tragedy explored a dual way of steering the audience's attention towards the horrific body, a verbal and a visual one, by first describing the horrific bodies offstage and then revealing them onstage. The appearance of the body, whether already dead or still suffering, and of the perpetrator of the act of violence was probably a convention of Greek theater.[35] The medium to display onstage and thus visualize what has just been verbally described by a messenger or another character was the *ekkyklema*, a stage machine that was expected to appear shortly after an act of violence has taken place inside the *skene* or in a location beyond the confines of the immediate dramatic space. However, evidence on the *ekkyklema* is scarce and inconclusive. The only extant philological testimony for the *ekkyklema* is owed to the second-century CE grammarian Pollux, who notes that this machine was used for showing 'unspeakable acts committed behind the scene within the house' (*Onom*. 4.128: δείκνυσι τὰ ὑπὸ σκηνὴν ἐν ταῖς οἰκίαις ἀπόρρητα πραχθέντα). This definition is open to (mis)interpretation since it is not certain whether Pollux was referring to an old, i.e. classical, or just a contemporary, i.e. imperial, theatrical practice; moreover, the exact meaning of ἀπόρρητος eludes us,[36] whereas the expression 'what cannot or should not be said' sounds incongruous within the context of the preceding verbal description in messenger speeches and the like.

Although the technicalities of the *ekkyklema* remain obscure, the tragic texts themselves point towards a scenic visualization, a *tableau*, of the horrific bodies, occurring after the opening of the *skene* doorway and developing as a revelation of the outcome of the offstage carnage.[37] Euripides explores this technique to the full. In the *Hippolytus* Theseus urges his followers to bring his son to the fore so that he may see him with his own eyes (1265: κομίζετ᾽ αὐτόν, ὡς ἰδὼν ἐν ὄμμασιν), an appearance that is fully realized when the dying Hippolytus is carried on the stage (cf. 1342–4: καὶ μὴν ὁ τάλας ὅδε δὴ στείχει,/σάρκας νεαρὰς ξανθόν τε κάρα/ διαλυμανθείς). The audience's expectations for the appearance of the victims are postponed in the *Medea:* to Jason's anguished attempt to break the palace's doors and view his dead children (1313–15: πύλας ἀνοίξας σῶν τέκνων ὄψηι φόνον. / {Ια.} χαλᾶτε κλῇιδας ὡς τάχιστα, πρόσπολοι, / ἐκλύεθ᾽ ἁρμούς, ὡς ἴδω διπλοῦν κακόν) Medea responds by appearing with their corpses on the Chariot of the Sun (1317–22). Another *tableau* that brings the inside in front of the spectators' eyes is found in *Heracles*, where the hero awakes surrounded by the corpses of his wife and children (1042–162) and, thus exposed to the public eye, he gradually realizes the atrocities he has committed. A similar example derives from Euripides' *Electra*, where the 'murder and revelation' scene is not only prolonged but also repeated during the play, first with the corpse of Aegisthus (or the severed head, cf. 855–7: ἔρχεται δὲ σοὶ/ κάρα ᾽πιδείξων, οὐχὶ Γοργόνος φέρων / ἀλλ᾽ ὃν στυγεῖς Αἴγισθον) and then with that of Clytemnestra (880–1232, cf. 1172–82 where both the two murderers and the two corpses appear onstage).[38] In all of these scenes, situated at the climax of the plays, the boundaries between inside and outside are blurred and what was previously said but unseen is exposed in broad daylight.[39] Yet, since little is known about actual theatrical practice, crucial questions remain open, such as whether the revealed bodies displayed the gory physical details anticipated by their description or were mere dummies, crude copies of a human body; whether the revelation supplemented the violent act or offered a duplication/variation of it; how other theatrical conventions, such as music, noises or cries, enhanced the dramatic effect.

It is notable that the tragic texts with their embedded stage instructions reinforce the hypothesis that there existed a 'theatricality of horror' on the ancient Greek stage. The visual dimension of theatrical horror, just like its verbal depiction, was explored differently by each of the tragedians *qua* directors of their plays. Already in antiquity Aeschylus was known for relying on stage effects to stir the emotions of the spectators; the *Oresteia* was notorious for showing horror in the theatre.[40] The trilogy as a whole presents the 'director' of the play with ample opportunity to create the dramatic illusion of horror. In the *Agamemnon* the king as a dead man walking towards his death enters the palace by stepping on the scarlet robes laid by Clytemnestra (905–74). As is the case with the blood-vocabulary, words indicating red colour on the setting (910: πορφυρόστρωτος πόρος, 957: πορφύρας πατῶν, 959: πορφύρας) give us an idea of how Aeschylus scenically foreshadowed the carnage in the bloody bath.[41] And there is one testimony (of uncertain chronology) claiming that Aeschylus used a distinctive theatrical technique, when he presented the murder of Agamemnon as an onstage event (*Hypoth. to Ag.*: ἰδίως δὲ Αἰσχύλος τὸν Ἀγαμέμνονα ἐπὶ σκηνῆς ἀναιρεῖσθαι ποιεῖ).[42] Judging from the text, it is obvious that both the *Agamemnon* and the *Choephoroi* concluded with the displaying of the dead bodies (of Agamemnon/Cassandra *Ag.* 1372–576 and of Aegisthus/ Clytemnestra *Ch.* 971–1064 respectively) by the murderers themselves, who were covered in blood (cf. Clytemnestra in *Ag.* 1390: βάλλει μ᾽ ἐρεμνῇ ψακάδι φοινίας δρόσου and Orestes in *Ch.* 1055: ποταίνιον γὰρ αἷμά σοι χεροῖν ἔτι). The tomb of Agamemnon in the *Choephoroi* and the ghost of Clytemnestra in the *Eumenides* demonstrate that an early form of gothic horror was also present in the staging of Aeschylus' trilogy.[43] Moreover, the apparition of the Furies at the end of the *Choephoroi*, as a specter visible only to Orestes at first (*Ch.* 1048–64), was scenically presented in the *Eumenides* in its full graphic detail. According to the ancient *Life*, the Chorus of the Furies stunned the original audience, although it is not clear whether it was the visuals or the acoustics that allegedly caused children to faint and pregnant women to miscarry (*TrGFVita Aeschyli* 1.9).[44] On the whole, the combination of the visual symbolism of the red and black coloured fabrics, the bloodied props, the gothic setting and onstage apparitions, not to mention acoustic effects such as off-stage cries of the victims and shrills of the Furies, explain why the original performance of the *Oresteia* became a theatrical event lodged in the consciousness of its contemporary audience as a phantasmagoria of horror that inspired theatrical directors over the centuries.[45]

Sophocles seems to have had a different take on horror and its scenic display. Less extravagant than his predecessor, it is likely that Sophocles opted for a rather austere visualization but with heightened emotional intensity. As argued above, the tragic isolation of the so-called Sophoclean hero renders the human body the focal point, the dramatic space reflecting the physical, psychological and mental suffering of the protagonist.[46] The notion that heroism resides within the, externally and/or internally, wounded body, indeed in the gaping wound itself, probably shaped the theatricality of Sophoclean horror. Showing Heracles who is eaten alive by the robe in the *Trachiniae* or the infected foot of Philoctetes which oozes blood and pus are two paradigms of 'live' horror on the Sophoclean stage.[47] But Sophocles may have been also unique in his choice to present suicide committed onstage before the spectators' eyes. The *Ajax* must have offered a bloody spectacle to its original audience, at least in two key scenes of the play. The first visually captures the aftermath of the slaughtering of the cattle by the insane hero, who, according to the ancient testimony, appeared on the *ekkyklema* holding his sword and covered in blood (346–429).[48] In the second, according to the ancient scholia, the hero fixed his sword into the ground in a desolate space and impaled himself upon it (815–919).[49] If so, Ajax's suicide, switched from a messenger's narration to a real-time stage event, would have been a remarkable innovation by Sophocles.[50] Ajax's corpse, thus exposed, would have dominated the stage until the end of the play thus creating an indelible impression of theatrical horror on the audience.

Euripides' conception of staged horror, especially as regards the horrific body, stands in stark contrast to that of Sophocles. Whereas Sophocles viewed the body as a space upon which the crisis of the tragic self could be projected as a physical event, Euripides considered the extreme cases of tragic violence as an opportunity to focus on gore and blood. It would be fair to assert that whereas Sophocles focused on the wounded body as a whole, Euripides revelled in exploring its fragmentariness. Often accused for the artificiality of his theatrical technique, Euripides essentially employed *grand guignol* effects to trigger a visceral reaction to the spectators. His penchant for graphic verbal representation of all sorts of killing in messenger speeches was in all probability complemented by a visual portrayal as well. However, given the restrictions surrounding the visibility of bloody actions in the theatre, Euripides, as is the case with the other two tragedians as well, could only in exceptional cases enact graphic violence on stage. A striking example of such an exception is the finale of the *Bacchae*.[51]After the Maenads have ripped the limbs and torn apart the body of Pentheus on Cithaeron, a scene reproduced through the narration of the messenger, Agave enters the stage holding Pentheus' severed head, around which a large part of the final scene revolves (1200–300). Emphasis is laid on the visuals of the scene, as one can infer from the *deixis* and viewing terminology of the text (1200–1: δεῖξόν νυν, ὦ τάλαινα, σὴν νικηφόρον/ἀστοῖσιν ἄγραν, 1203: ἔλθεθ᾽ ὡς ἴδητε τήνδ᾽ ἄγραν, 1238: φέρω δ᾽ ἐν ὠλέναισιν, ὡς ὁρᾶις, 1280: ἔα, τί λεύσσω; τί φέρομαι τόδ᾽ ἐν χεροῖν;). One of the questions still disputed is the nature of the prop Agave was holding (probably the mask representing Pentheus?), a problem further complicated by the continuation of the scene once the body of Pentheus is carried on stage (1216–21). It appears that at the end the fragmented body of Pentheus was made whole again by the assembling together of his torn limbs (1300: ἦ πᾶν ἐν ἄρθροις συγκεκλῃμένον καλῶς;). So, not only the head but also the limbs and limbless body were part of the setting?[52] If and how the procedure of reuniting the dismembered body was performed in front of the audience remains one of the mysteries of Euripides' stagecraft.[53]

Suffering and dying was a time-consuming as well as a complex dramatic process in Greek tragedy, beginning in the second half of a play and leading to its climactic finale through a combination of *lexis* (usually a farewell monologue and/or a messenger speech), *opsis* (the revelation *tableau* and possibly the *ekkyklema*) and *melos* (the subsequent mourning of the dead in the form of a *kommos*), usually followed by the preparation of the corpse(s) for burial.[54] The scenic events discussed above – the chain of murders in the *Oresteia*, the suicide of Ajax, the dismemberment of Pentheus – may have adopted different approaches to theatrical horror.[55] Evidently ancient theatre-goers expected to witness verbally as well as visually the horrors stemming from tragic violence and they were probably familiar with the distinctive style of each playwright in the presentation of horror. What is less easy to determine is whether their reaction was one of empathy, shock or pleasure. The question should be primarily associated with the visual presentation of horror and its effects, considering the ambivalent attitude expressed towards the performative aspects of tragedy during antiquity. Since this topic has been extensively treated by scholars in recent years, I will only briefly refer to the 'possible' ways of responding to theatrical horror.

Aristotle juxtaposes the cognitive and sensory ways of creating the 'pity-and-fear' effect through tragic representation, by deeming the latter secondary or inferior in terms of artistic merit (*Poet.* 1450b.16). However, he admits that the power of vision and hence of spectacle can affect the souls of the people (*Poet.* 1453b.1–3, note esp. the term ψυχαγωγικόν).[56] The dangers inherent in relying excessively on spectacle as opposed to plot are described in *Poet.* 1453b.1–11:

> That which is terrifying and pitiable can arise from spectacle (ἐκ τῆς ὄψεως), but it can also arise from the structure of the incidents itself; this is superior and belongs to a better poet . . . To produce this by means of spectacle is less artful and requires lavish production (χορηγίας δεόμενον). Those poets who use spectacle to produce what is only monstrous (τερατῶδες) and not terrifying (μὴ τὸ φοβερόν) have nothing in common with tragedy. For we should not seek every kind of pleasure (πᾶσαν ἡδονήν) from tragedy, but only the sort which is particular to it.
>
> *Trans. R. Janko*

Aristotle warns of the cheap horror effects and stagecraft produced in the theatre but does not dismiss vision as a means of arousing emotions in performance. According to him, both the tragic poet and the orator ought to bring an event 'before one's eyes' (πρὸ ὀμμάτων) to arouse the emotions of the audience (*Poet*. 1455a.23, *Rhet*. 1405b.12 and passim). Apparently, this aim was fulfilled in a dual way by tragedians, first by the use of 'metaphorical vision' and then, to further stir the emotions, by 'visual effects'.[57] The line dividing the genuinely terrifying (φοβερόν) from the prodigiously staged horror that lacks a deeper emotion (τερατῶδες) was a thin one in ancient as in modern theatrical practice, one depending primarily on the aesthetics and lavishness of a production, and Aristotle seems to be stating precisely this.[58]

Another effect commonly associated with visual horror is that of amazement and awe (ἔκπληξις, sometimes κατάπληξις). Already present in Euripides' criticism of the sensational stagecraft of Aeschylus in Aristophanes' *Frogs* (961–2), it is frequently used by ancient critics and the scholia to add a note of shock and wonder to the emotions of 'pity and fear' experienced by the audience.[59] The scholiasts link scenic visual amazement with intense *pathos*, which is one of the three main components of tragedy (e.g. Sch. Soph. *Aj*. 346a: εἰς ἔκπληξιν γὰρ φέρει καὶ ταῦτα τὸν θεατήν, τὰ ἐν τῇ ὄψει περιπαθέστερα). Elsewhere ancient philologists associate it with the Aristotelian 'monstrous', when for example they describe the visual effects used by Aeschylus (*TrGF Vita Aeschyli* 1.7: ταῖς τε γὰρ ὄψεσι καὶ τοῖς μύθοις πρὸς ἔκπληξιν τερατώδη μᾶλλον ἢ πρὸς ἀπάτην κέχρηται [sc. Αἰσχύλος]). It is possible that the amazement deriving from the display of horror had a mass appeal, as it was the broader audience of the theatre which would readily recognize and respond to it (cf. *TrGFVita Aeschyli* 1.9: ἐκπλῆξαι τὸν δῆμον). Amazement caused by horror was a pleasurable experience for the spectators, though not necessarily of high quality.[60]

Indeed, horror was paradoxically a source of pleasure for audiences in ancient Greece, as it is for modern-day theatre-goers and fans of horror movies;[61] but unlike the horrors experienced in the dark halls of contemporary theatres and cinemas, the directors of the past, Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, had to expose the horrific bodies and their sufferings in open air under the bright light of the sun.

Notes

1. Kubrick's *The Shining* thematizes domestic violence within a dysfunctional family. See e.g. Leibowitz and Jeffress 1981; Hornbeck 2016. For the conventions of horror and their parody in the film, see Smith 1997.
2. To bridge this gap Adams and Bolt 2016 have attempted an interesting, albeit superficial, parallelism between the two genres.
3. Another striking feature shared by Greek tragedy and modern horror is the proliferation of deaths, a trend reflected in the making of 'sequels'; cf. Adams and Bolt 2016, who note that 'viewing modern horror as tragedy indicates that we should perhaps have a greater sensitivity to the tragic potentiality in each death: each death is capable of the production of further deaths, continuing or creating a cycle of violence'.* For a comparison between the *Agamemnon* and Kubrick's film, see Bakewell 2018.
4. For an overview of the role of violence in Greek drama, see Goldhill 1991, Seidensticker 2006.

5. This thematic emphasis of Greek drama was already pointed out by Isocrates (*Panath.* 121–2): 'For what among crimes that are unparalleled in their wickedness and cruelty shall we not find to have been perpetrated in the other states and especially in those which at the time of which I am speaking were considered the greatest and even now are so reputed? Has there not abounded in them murder of brothers and fathers and guest-friends; matricide and incest and begetting of children by sons with their own mothers; feasting of a father on the flesh of his own sons, plotted by those nearest of kin; exposure of infants by parents, and drownings and blindings and other iniquities so many in number that no lack of material has ever been felt by those who are wont each year to present in the theatre the miseries which transpired in those days?' (trans. G. Norlin). On death as a focal theme of Greek tragedy, see Hall 2010: 69–85.
6. For the prohibition of showing onstage violence, whereas its telling was allowed through messenger speeches, see Sommerstein 2010: 30–46.
7. For the 'long reach' of horror from antiquity to modernity, see the excellent overview by Cruz (this volume).
8. The philosophy of 'art-horror', in comparison to Aristotle's conception of tragic emotions, is brilliantly discussed by Carroll 1990.
9. See now the monograph by Worman 2012a.
10. Janko 1987: 97 understands *pathos* as any violent deed that lies at the core of a tragic plot; however, he is reluctant to accept that Aristotle may also refer to the theatrical practice here and takes 'death in full view' to suggest deaths reported by a messenger and vividly 'put before one's eyes' through language.* For a full analysis of *pathos* in plot, see Belfiore 1992: 134–41.
11. On the semiotic use of the body in Greek tragedy, see Griffith 1998. On the male body as spectacle on the Greek stage, see Hawley 1998; for the role of male and female bodies in Greek tragedy, see Hawley 2013.
12. For a well-argued study of the dying body in Greek tragedy, see Janka 2009. On the body as a central space of Greek tragedy in three heavily 'embodied' tragedies, namely Euripides' *Hecuba*, *Electra* and the *Bacchae*, see Rehm 2002: 168–214.
13. For a discussion of similar questions, see Most (this volume).
14. Kin murder, the core theme especially in the *Oresteia*, is likened to 'a dripping wound which will not heal' and hence images of flowing and dripping of blood are essential to the trilogy; see Lebeck 1971: 80–1.
15. The importance of the suffering body results probably from Sophocles' focus on the isolated individual who suffers the consequences of his heroic temper, as Knox 1964 has famously argued.
16. Zeitlin 1965 argues that the theme of sacrifice pervades the *Oresteia* thus contributing to the atmosphere of violence and horror. On the stylization of Iphigeneia's sacrifice in accordance with ritual and iconographic models in the *Agamemnon*, see Henrichs 2006: 67–74. Tragic violence is based on the assimilation between sacrifice and murder on the one hand, and human and animal sacrifice on the other, as is argued by Henrichs 2000. On the language of the parodos and the blood imagery, see also Chesi 2014: 15–27 with bibliography.
17. On the blood as an evocation of the past, see Kyriakou 2011: 112–24.
18. Lebeck 1971: 80–91 calls this distinctive feature of the *Oresteia* 'the endless flow of blood'.* On bodily fluids in antiquity, including blood and other fluids in Aeschylus, see the collective volume by Bradley et al. 2021.
19. Lebeck 1971: 80–91 focuses on three images evoking the dripping of blood in the trilogy: the cloth flowing to the ground in the *Agamemnon*, the libations poured to earth in the *Choephoroi*, and the poison which the dust drinks down in the *Eumenides*.

20. On the 'aesthetics of horror' embedded in the language of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* and Sophocles' *Antigone*, see Bohrer 2006.
21. Blood imagery is also at play in Sophocles. A striking example of the elaborate representation of blood is connected to the blinding of Oedipus (*OT* 1276–9): 'At the same time as he was striking, bloody eyeballs (φοίνιαι γλῆναι) were wetting his cheeks, nor did they let up damp drops of gore (φόνου σταγόνας), but together a black shower (μέλας ὄμβρος) of hail of blood (χάλαζά θ᾽αἱματοῦσσα) was being wetted' (trans. P. J. Finglass). However, the goriness of the passage makes it probable that lines 1278–9 were interpolated; cf. Finglass 2018: 558–9.
22. On the *autocheiria* in Sophocles, see Hiscock 2018.
23. Ballengee 2009: 17–64 persuasively describes the legal and political symbolism of the tortured body and the corpse in Sophocles' Theban plays.
24. Segal 1986: 118–21 argues that alongside the sword in the *Ajax*, the urn in the *Electra* and the bow in the *Philoctetes*, the robe is a scenic object of powerful visual symbolism. On the robe as a symbol of Deianeira and Heracles' tragic marriage, see Pozzi 1994. On the imagery of the deadly *peplos* in tragedy and especially in the *Trachiniae*, see Lee 2004: 269–73.
25. Jouanna 2012: 55–79 argues that the 'devouring' disease in the *Trachiniae* and other tragedies is a medical metaphor. On the reversal of gender roles implied by the killing of Heracles by the robe, see Cawthorn 2008: 79–97.
26. This description is part of a kin messenger scene, which presupposes an intense emotional engagement of the messenger with the suffering character; see Hernandez 2017: 113–15.
27. Cf. Segal 1986: 120, who observes that the robe is described as 'a living being, a ravening monster or beast'* which carries upon it, both visually as well as metaphorically, the poisons of monsters such as the Hydra and the Centaur, and in effect the poisons of Heracles' dark past. On the monstrosity, darkness and primitiveness in the *Trachiniae*, cf. also Segal 1995: 26–68.
28. As Segal 1995: 30 observes, 'In all of these events a violent, primitive past encroaches upon and destroys a civilized house with which we identify and sympathize. From that point on, the spectacle before our eyes consists almost exclusively of groans, spasms of unbearable agony, terrible writhings and outcries.'* For the representation of pain in Greek tragedy, with emphasis on Sophocles, see Budelmann 2006.
29. The anatomical elements and technical terminology found in the gory scenes of Euripides' plays are owed to the influence of contemporary medicine (Craik 2001). Euripides is masterful in describing medical symptoms as a demonstration of daemonic powers that take control of the physical body (Holmes 2010: 228–74).
30. The impression of visuality is reinforced by terms of viewing introducing the horrific moment (*Med*. 1167: τοὐνθένδε μέντοι δεινὸν ἦν θέαμ᾽ ἰδεῖν, 1196 κάρτα δυσμαθὴς ἰδεῖν; *Bacch*. 1063: τοὐντεῦθεν ἤδη τοῦ ξένου θαυμάσθ᾽ ὁρῶ etc.). De Jong 1991: 1–62 rightly argues that the messenger acts as an eyewitness, thus becoming the focalizer; cf. Barrett 2002: 102–31, who takes the messenger speech of the *Bacchae* as a paradigm to argue that the spectator resides within the text of the drama.
31. For the deadly *peplos* in the *Medea*, see Lee 2004: 273–5.
32. Madness and the bestialization of the hero constitute the context of violence in Euripides' *Heracles* (Provenza 2013).
33. For a recent study of Pentheus' *sparagmos*, see Weaver 2009; on violence and suffering as an essential parameter of the *Bacchae*, see Perris 2011.
34. For a narratological analysis of both messenger scenes, see Lamari 2010: 93–100.

35. That the display of the dead bodies forms an essential aspect of the corporeality in Greek tragedy is argued by Griffith 1998: esp. 232–3.
36. According to *LSJ* s.v. ἀπόρρητος, the word may denote something a) forbidden, b) secret (in political or religious contexts) and c) unfit to be spoken of, abominable. The oldest source is Aristophanes who uses the verb ἐκκυκλεῖν (*Ach*. 408–9; *Thesm*. 95–6) but not in connection with dead bodies. However, Bethe 1934: 21–32 has denied the existence of such a rolling platform in fifth-century theatre.
37. The term *tableau* is used by Taplin 2003: 101–21 to denote 'a place where there is not only a lack of dramatic movement, but also some or all of the visual constituents of a scene are held still for a longer or shorter time in a combination that captures or epitomizes a particular state of affairs' (101).*
38. The *Electra* has been often used as a paradigm of Euripidean stagecraft; see Marshall 1999–2000, Raeburn 2000, Rehm 2002: 187–200.
39. The idea of 'suffering under the sun' is introduced and brilliantly argued by Hall 2010: 1–11, e.g. when she notes that 'all these tragic heroes or heroines uttered their laments under the sun which beat down upon them and whose light they were about to leave forever; the audiences who watched and listened shared that sunlight with them' (3).*
40. An indispensable book is Taplin 1977. On the *Oresteia* stagecraft, see Sider 1978; for the ancient sources about the *Agamemnon* on stage, see Easterling 2005. For the scenic display of murder and dead bodies in the *Agamemnon*, see Janka 2009: 4–14.
41. The bloody bath of Agamemnon is analysed by Seaford 2018: 229–41.
42. On the legacy of this scene, see Easterling 2005: 24–8.
43. Horror settings such as tombs or the appearance of ghosts are typical of Aeschylus' theatrical practice; cf. *Vita Aeschyli* 1.14: πρῶτος Αἰσχύλος πάθεσι γενικωτάτοις τὴν τραγωδίαν ηὔξησεν την τε σκηνὴν ἐκόσμησεν καὶ τὴν ὄψιν τῶν θεωμένων κατέπληξε τῇ λαμπρότητι, γραφαῖς καὶ μηχαναῖς, βωμοῖς τε καὶ τάφοις, σάλπιγξιν, εἰδώλοις, Ἐρινύσι.
44. On the Furies as stage presences, see the discussion in Easterling 2008.
45. For the performative possibilities of the *Agamemnon* from antiquity to our era, see Macintosh et al. 2005.
46. Worman 2012b discusses the Sophoclean body, mostly male, which despite its heroic stature is undermined by its stasis and vulnerability. On its static positioning at the centre of the stage, Worman notes: 'Think of Ajax's entrapped, immobile position before, or just within, the central *skene* door and his later isolated stalking of death at the margins, or the wounded Philoctetes, marooned center stage in conversation with the lonely hills, also the perforated Heracles on his funeral pyre, the debilitated Oedipus on his rock in the grove at Colonus' (353).* On how Sophocles exploited the so-called 'eremetic space' i.e. the desolated area as a setting for Antigone, Ajax and Philoctetes, see Rehm 2002: 114–55.
47. The former evokes horror as associated with bestiality (Segal 1995: 26–68), whereas the latter presents itself as a form of the abject (Worman 2012b: 357–9). On torture and pain as a recurring theme in the theatre of Sophocles, see Ballengee 2009: 17–64.
48. Sch. Soph. *Aj*. 346a: ἐνταῦθα ἐκκύκλημά τι γίνεται, ἵνα φανῇ ἐν μέσοις ὁ Αἴας τοῖς ποιμνίοις. εἰς ἔκπληξιν γὰρ φέρει καὶ ταῦτα τὸν θεατήν, τὰ ἐν τῇ ὄψει περιπαθέστερα. δείκνυται δὲ ξιφήρης, ᾑματωμένος, μεταξὺ τῶν ποιμνίων καθήμενος.
49. Sch. Soph. *Aj*. 815a: φθάνει Αἰσχύλος ἐν Θρῄσσαις τὴν ἀναίρεσιν Αἴαντος δι᾽ ἀγγέλου ἀπαγγείλας. ἴσως οὖν καινοτομεῖν βουλόμενος [sc. ὁ Σοφοκλῆς] καὶ μὴ κατακολουθεῖν τοῖς ἑτέρου \<ἴχνεσιν\>, ὑπ᾽ ὄψιν ἔθηκε τὸ δρώμενον ἢ μᾶλλον ἐκπλῆξαι βουλόμενος.

50. A thorough analysis of the stagecraft of Ajax's suicide is the collected volume by Most and Ozbek 2015.
51. Rehm 2002: 200–14 discusses the role of the 'theatrical body' in the *Bacchae*, by highlighting its symbolic and metatheatrical meaning.
52. According to the third-century CE rhetorician Apsines, Agave lamented her dead son by embracing each one of his disjointed limbs (*Τέχνη ῥητορική* 10.35, 10.40–1). That Agave touched and embraced her son's dismembered body as part of a mother's lament is argued by Segal 1999–2000, who points out the heightened *pathos* and horror of the scene.
53. The *compositio membrorum* is part of funerary ritual; see Easterling 2006. Literary and iconographic evidence demonstrate that the manner of Pentheus' death was Euripides' innovation, as argued by March 1989. For an extreme scenic presentation of the final scene of the *Bacchae* as 'drenched in blood' by Matthias Langhoff in 1997 and the scandal it caused among Greek audiences for being sacrilegious, see Van Steen 2013.
54. Macintosh 1994 has convincingly shown that death in Greek tragedy is not a single catastrophic event but a process unfolding within the tragic conceptualization of time.
55. For numerous other horror *tableaux*, based on the onstage presentation of corpses in the plays of the three tragedians, see Janka 2009.
56. Aristotle's views have been variously interpreted and his disdain for *opsis* should not be taken for granted. For a revised account of Aristotle's theory on spectacle, see Munteanu 2012: 80–90.
57. The distinction between the two is made by Munteanu 2003.
58. Differently Konstan 2013, who argues that the τερατῶδες, the closest we can get to the modern notion of horror, suggests the elementary and instinctive response in the theatre as opposed to the φοβερόν, denoting fear as the product of a complex moral and cognitive procedure.
59. On this view, see the arguments by Belfiore 1992: 216–22.
60. Aristotle argues that among the pleasures experienced in the theatre only one was inherent in the genre of tragedy (*Poet.* 1453b.10–11): οὐ γὰρ πᾶσαν δεῖ ζητεῖν ἡδονὴν ἀπὸ τραγῳδίας ἀλλὰ τὴν οἰκείαν. For the mass pleasure triggered by tragedy, see Plato, *Gorg*. 502b–c: δῆλον δὴ τοῦτό γε, ὦ Σώκρατες, ὅτι πρὸς τὴν ἡδονὴν μᾶλλον ὥρμηται [sc. ἡ τραγῳδία] καὶ τὸ χαρίζεσθαι τοῖς θεαταῖς.
61. To enjoy painful events stemming from horror is characterized as 'hedonic ambivalence'* by Strohl 2012; for this paradox of the horror genre, see Carroll 1990: 158–95.

Translations

Aeschylus, *Oresteia*. Translated by Ch. Collard, Oxford 2002.
Aristotle, *Poetics* I. Translated with notes by R. Janko, Indianapolis, Cambridge 1987.
Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*. Edited with introduction, translation, and commentary by P. J. Finglass, Cambridge 2018.
Sophocles, *The Women of Trachis* and *Philoctetes*. A new translation in verse by R. Torrance, Boston 1966.
Euripides, *The Phoenissae*. Translated by E. P. Coleridge, New York 1938.

CHAPTER 4

THE HORRIFIC BODY IN SOPHOCLES[1]*

Glenn W. Most

The intensity, the productivity, but also the drawbacks of the influence of Aristotle's *Poetics* upon subsequent Western interpretations of Greek tragedy are probably nowhere more evident than in the countless discussions to which it has given rise regarding the specific emotions that the genre of tragedy evokes most intensely in its audiences. Since Aristotle's *Poetics*, these emotions have traditionally been identified as being especially pity and fear. For these are the two emotions that are canonized in Aristotle's definition of tragedy in Chapter 6 of that treatise: 'Therefore tragedy is a representation of an action … accomplishing by means of pity and fear the purgation of these kinds of emotions', ἔστιν οὖν τραγῳδία μίμησις πράξεως … δ' ἐλέου καὶ φόβου περαίνουσα τὴν τῶν τοιούτων παθημάτων κάθαρσιν (1449b23–9, my translation). Aristotle does not explain in this lapidary definition what exactly he means by 'pity' and 'fear', why it is that he selects two emotions rather than only one, why precisely these are the two he selects, and above all just what he means by his mysterious reference to the purgation of these kinds of emotions. For additional information on Aristotle's views on these matters we may turn to some of his other works, especially his *Rhetoric*, *Politics*, and medical writings;[2] but the degree of relevance and the hermeneutical consequences of these passages for the discussion of catharsis and emotions in the *Poetics* are controversial. In fact, there are two other passages in the *Poetics* in which Aristotle also mentions a third emotion, wonder or astonishment, τὸ θαυμαστόν or θαυμασιώτατα (9.1452a1–11, 24.1460a11–18) as an effect, other than pity or fear, that should be sought in tragedy.[3] But astonishment is certainly not the prime emotion Aristotle associates with tragedy: for in the first of these two passages he claims that astonishment arises especially from 'events that cause fear and pity' (φοβερῶν καὶ ἐλεεινῶν) and that it is such events that belong to tragedy (9.1452a1–4); and in the second one he seems to claim that epic is better at causing astonishment than tragedy is. Indeed, throughout the *Poetics* it is pity and fear that recur terminologically as being especially characteristic of tragedy: this pair of emotions is called 'the peculiar feature', ἴδιον, of this kind of representation (13.1452b30–3) and 'the pleasure that is proper', οἰκεία ἡδονή, to tragedy (14.1453a10–13,[4] cf. also 11.1452a38–b2, 13.1453a2–6, 14.1453b8–13).

It is not hard to see why Aristotle might well have thought pity and fear to be particularly relevant to tragedy, even though he never explicitly justifies his choice of these two emotions as the paradigmatic tragic emotions in his *Poetics*, but simply mentions them repeatedly and presupposes their specific pertinence to this genre.[5] After all, most tragedies tend to show bad things happening to people, many of whom do not deserve them (though of course this is not true of all tragedies). And given the structure of human temporality, these misfortunes either seem likely to happen in the future or else have already happened in the past or present (in which case people who reacted to them might well be led to feel pity), or else they have not yet happened in the past or present but might well be expected to happen in the future (in which case such people might well feel fear). For we fear bad things that have not yet happened, or about whose effective happening we are not yet sure; whereas we can feel pity for bad things whether they are past, present, or future. And indeed, Greek tragedies are full of passages in which the choruses or characters express the emotions of pity and fear with regard to the actual or likely conditions of themselves or of other characters;[6] in doing so they provide guidelines for the spectators' reactions to the tragic events, increasing the audience's emotional involvement in the plays and focusing their moral dimension.

All the same, the exclusive predominance of these two emotions in Aristotle's theory of tragedy does seem a bit odd. For while it is certainly true that among Aristotle's predecessors, pity and fear had been a pair of emotions that had become formulaic in discussions of literature, nevertheless, as far as we can tell, before Aristotle they had never been associated with tragedy in particular as a poetic genre distinct from other literary forms. Thus Gorgias writes in his encomium of Helen:

> I consider all poetry to be speech that possesses meter, and I give it this name. Those who hear it are penetrated by a terribly fearful shuddering, a much-weeping pity, and a yearning that desires grief, and on the basis of the good fortunes and misfortunes of other people's actions and bodies their soul is affected, by an affection of its own, by the medium of words.
>
> τὴν ποίησιν ἅπασαν καὶ νομίζω καὶ ὀνομάζω λόγον ἔχοντα μέτρον· ἧς τοὺς ἀκούοντας εἰσῆλθε καὶ φρίκη περίφοβος καὶ ἔλεος πολύδακρυς καὶ πόθος φιλοπενθής, ἐπ' ἀλλοτρίων τε πραγμάτων καὶ σωμάτων εὐτυχίαις καὶ δυσπραγίαις ἴδιόν τι πάθημα διὰ τῶν λόγων ἔπαθεν ἡ ψυχή.
>
> Helen *9*

The first two of the emotions Gorgias names, 'a terribly fearful shuddering', φρίκη περίφοβος, and 'a much-weeping pity', ἔλεος πολύδακρυς, are clearly somewhere in the background of Aristotle's own usage of the noticeably tamer terms ἔλεος and φόβος in his *Poetics*; yet Gorgias nowhere suggests that he is thinking exclusively or even primarily of tragedy alone, but instead applies these terms explicitly to all forms of poetry whatsoever that are written in verse. And in his *Ion* Plato lets his rhapsode Ion use this same pair of emotions when he discusses the effect of poetry – but not of tragedy, but rather of his own public performances of Homeric epics: 'For whenever I speak of something pitiable, my eyes become filled with tears; and whenever it is of something fearful or terrible, my hair stands erect from fear and my heart leaps', ἐγὼ γὰρ ὅταν ἐλεεινόν τι λέγω, δακρύων ἐμπίπλανταί μου οἱ ὀφθαλμοί· ὅταν τε φοβερὸν ἢ δεινόν, ὀρθαὶ αἱ τρίχες ἵστανται ὑπὸ φόβου καὶ ἡ καρδία πηδᾷ (*Ion* 535c).

Examining these issues in greater depth might well help us to understand better Aristotle's relation to his predecessors in the theorization of tragedy and his generic distinction between tragedy and epic. Instead, however, in the present context I would like not to consider the two emotions that Aristotle consistently identifies with tragedy, but instead to draw attention to a different tragic emotion, one which tends to be neglected by Aristotle and many other theorists of tragedy but which as a matter of fact is of considerable importance: horror.[7] Horror shares with fear a strongly negative quality, and in common parlance horror and terror are sometimes confused with one another. But in fact, though horror is sometimes associated with fear in such a way that fear can become a component of a reaction of horror, the two emotions are very different and at least conceptually can be easily distinguished from one another.

Fear is a response to something terrible that has not yet happened (or about the reality of which one is not yet sure) but that is considered to be likely to happen; horror is a reaction to something terrible that has already happened in the present or (usually recent) past. Fear can encompass a broad spectrum of degrees of intensity, from wariness and trepidation through anxiety and alarm to dread and terror; horror is located only at the strongest extreme of emotionality. Fear is above all a psychological condition, which responds to a stimulus, one that is often visible but can often be unseen and only heard of, by imagining the sufferings that could be expected to arise from it; horror is an immediate, visceral reaction to the (usually visual) stimulus itself.[8] This essential bodily component is already suggested by the etymology of the word 'horror': it derives from the Latin *horror, horreo,* referring to the hair standing on end, and thence to shuddering or shivering, as a physical response to cold, revulsion, or some other factor.[9] Finally, fear is directed above all to the threatened physical well-being of oneself or of other people for whom one feels concern; but horror can involve not only emotional and psychological concern for security but also a far more profound moral or religious revulsion. Once the object of fear has been removed, one feels relief and some degree of comfort; but a genuine experience of horror may well leave psychic scars that can last a lifetime.[10]

We may define horror as a state of extreme revulsion, repugnance, or abhorrence which passes far beyond normal emotional limits and is often a response to an extraordinary violation of moral or religious norms; it is usually characterized by a swift and sudden flare-up, generally involves a prolonged continuation, and can lead to temporary psychological and physical paralysis and even to long-term or permanent impairment. Horror can sometimes possess a certain affinity to disgust, but disgust tends to be closer to nausea while horror seems closer to dread.[11] The ancient Greek words that correspond most closely to the Latin *horror* and *horreo* in all of their meanings are φρίκη, φρίσσω; but the Greek vocabulary seems to be wider and more varied than the Latin in this regard, as in others, and other Greek terms that can be used to designate horror include ὀρρωδία and ὀρροδέω, ἔκπληξις and ἐκπλήσσω, τάρβος and ταρβέω, and δεινός.

By contrast with ancient theoretical discussions of tragedy, which hardly ever mention horror as an emotional reaction to this genre, it is remarkable how often and how strongly the other forms of the ancient reception of tragedy insist upon horror as the effect it produces. For example, the ancient *Life of Aeschylus* uses forms of ἔκπληξις and ἐκπλήσσω in three passages to describe the effect of his plays:

> For he made use of visual effects and myths in order to produce a monstrous **horror** rather than to deceive people.
>
> ταῖς τε γὰρ ὄψεσι καὶ τοῖς μύθοις πρὸς **ἔκπληξιν** τερατώδη μᾶλλον ἢ πρὸς ἀπάτην κέχρηται.
>
> *7*
>
> Some people report that when he displayed the Eumenides, by bringing the chorus onto the scene in scattered groups he caused such great **horror** among the populace that small children fainted and that women aborted their embryos.
>
> τινὲς δέ φασιν ἐν τῇ ἐπιδείξει τῶν Εὐμενίδων σποράδην εἰσαγαγόντα τὸν χορὸν τοσοῦτον **ἐκπλῆξαι** τὸν δῆμον ὡς τὰ μὲν νήπια ἐκψῦξαι, τὰ δὲ ἔμβρυα ἐξαμβλωθῆναι.
>
> 9
>
> Aeschylus was the first to enhance tragedy with the most noble emotions, to ornament the stage, and to **horrify** the sight of the spectators by his splendour, his paintings and stage devices, his altars and tombs, his trumpets, ghosts, Erinyes, clothing the actors with gloves, making them seem bigger by using trailing robes, and raising them up on higher buskins.
>
> πρῶτος Αἰσχύλος πάθεσι γεννικωτάτοις τὴν τραγωιδίαν ηὔξησεν τήν τε σκηνὴν ἐκόσμησεν καὶ τὴν ὄψιν τῶν θεωμένων **κατέπληξεν** τῆι λαμπρότητι, γραφαῖς καὶ μηχαναῖς, βωμοῖς τε καὶ τάφοις, σάλπιγξιν, εἰδώλοις, Ἐρινύσι, τούς τε ὑποκριτὰς χειρῖσι σκεπάσας καὶ τῶι σύρματι ἐξογκώσας μείζοσί τε τοῖς κοθόρνοις μετεωρίσας.
>
> *14*

In all these passages, what is emphasized is an astonishing and profoundly disturbing sublimity that goes beyond normal limits and calls forth such a strong emotional reaction that not only the spectators' equanimity but even their very identity seems to be put in danger. It is notable that the *locus classicus* to which such descriptions ultimately refer is the opening scene of Aeschylus' *Eumenides*, which brilliantly represents the Erinyes, first to the Pythia and then to the audience, in a series of increasingly graphic degrees of first verbal and then visual horror.

This identification of horror as a supremely tragic emotion is also suggested in ancient pictorial representations of tragedy, for example in a celebrated mosaic depicting theatrical masks of Tragedy and Comedy dating from the second century CE and discovered at the Thermae Decianae at Rome (Figure 4.1). We have little difficulty identifying the male mask on the right as indicative of merriment and laughter: the mouth is open wide, with the corners drawn back and up, and the upper lip raised; the cheeks are drawn upwards and are deeply wrinkled; the eyes are only partially opened.[12] But what is the emotion expressed by the female mask on the left? Her mouth is open in an inarticulate scream of protest and revulsion; her eyes are transfixed by a sight upon

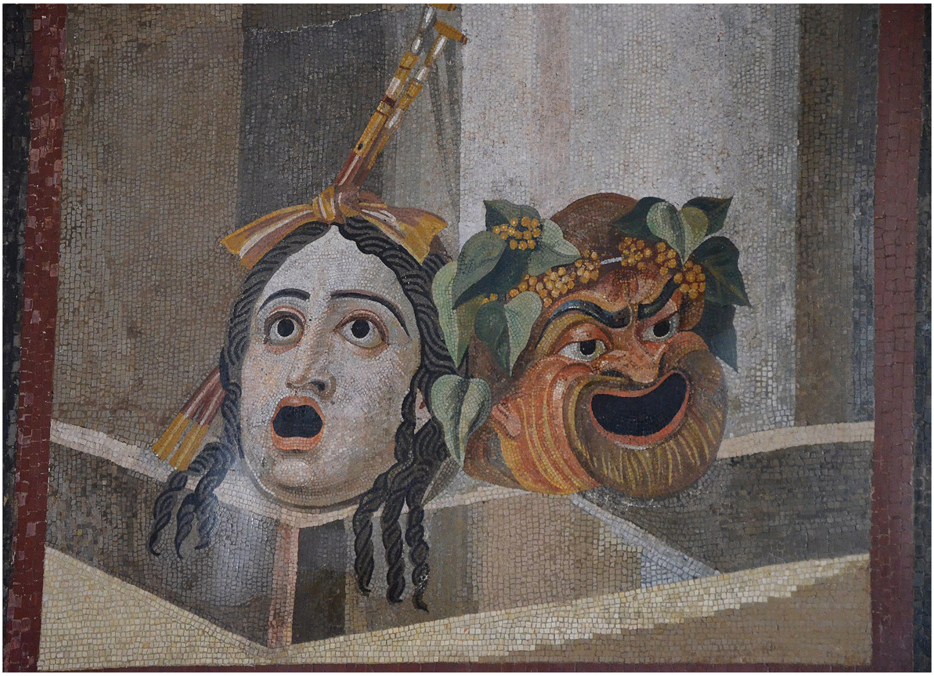


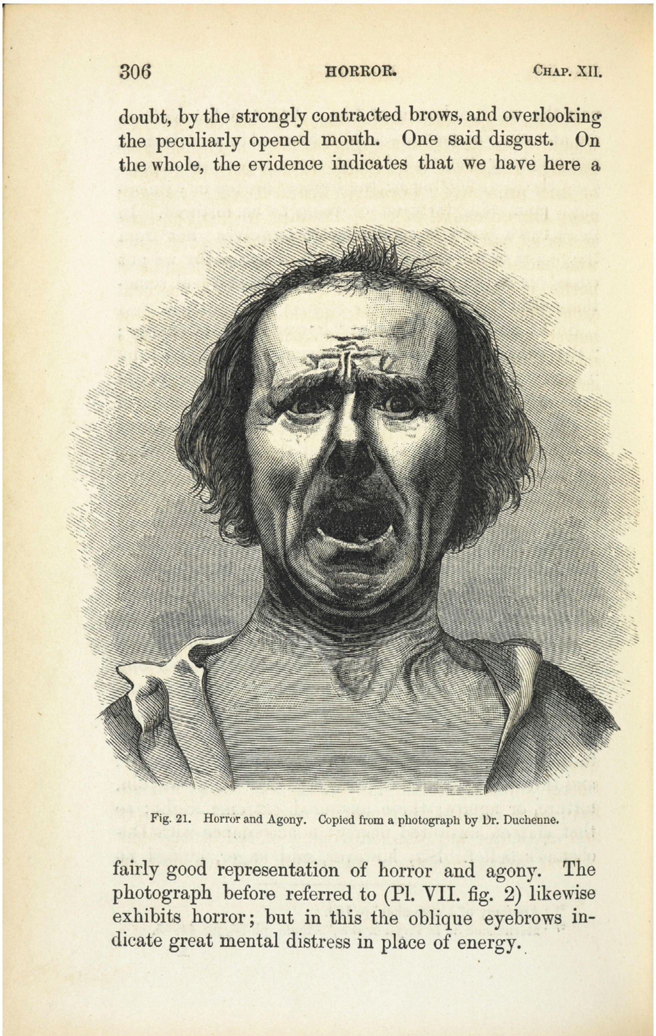
Figure 4.1 Theatrical masks of Tragedy and Comedy of the second century CE from the Thermae Decianae at Rome (Palazzo Nuovo, Capitoline Museums, Rome).

which she cannot endure to look and yet from which she cannot manage to free herself. This is not just fear – it can only be horror. As Darwin writes in his study of the expression of emotions,

> It is, therefore, probable that horror would generally be accompanied by the strong contraction of the brows; but as fear is one of the elements, the eyes and mouth would be opened, and the eyebrows would be raised, as far as the antagonistic action of the corrugators permitted this movement. Duchenne has given a photograph (fig. 21) of the same old man as before, with his eyes somewhat staring, the eyebrows partially raised, and at the same time strongly contracted, the mouth opened, and the platysma in action, all effected by the means of galvanism.[13]

The image Darwin cites (Figure 4.2)[14] seems in its horrified grimace to correspond exactly to the ancient tragic mask, as do other celebrated pictorial representations of horror.[15]

These ancient anecdotal and pictorial reactions to Greek tragedy which emphasize its horrors are direct responses to the scenes of horror that are often actually found in extant Greek tragedies. No surviving Greek tragedy presents an uninterrupted lengthy horrific scene or a series of such scenes (though Euripides' *Trojan Women* comes close). Instead, the tragedians seem to prefer a gradual build-up to a climactic moment of convulsive horror. It is these moments that seem to be especially memorable and that seem to be



306 HORROR. CHAP. XII.

doubt, by the strongly contracted brows, and overlooking the peculiarly opened mouth. One said disgust. On the whole, the evidence indicates that we have here a

Fig. 21. Horror and Agony. Copied from a photograph by Dr. Duchenne.

fairly good representation of horror and agony. The photograph before referred to (Pl. VII. fig. 2) likewise exhibits horror; but in this the oblique eyebrows indicate great mental distress in place of energy.

Figure 4.2 'Horror and Agony. Copied from a photograph by Dr. Duchenne', from Charles Darwin, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (London 1872), p. 306.

considered quintessentially tragic. They generally involve extreme human suffering due to human or divinely inflicted violence that goes beyond normal limits, and they often violate established religious or moral norms. In general there are two kinds of such moments in Greek tragedies that can produce horror: characters, the chorus, and presumably the spectators can react either to actually witnessing visually or acoustically terrible deeds that are in the course of being performed or that have already been performed, or else they can react to only hearing secondarily about various types of monstrosities such as the results of such deeds. But the boundary between these two kinds of horror is fuzzy and sometimes the distinction is blurred.

Some examples from the various tragedians will give an idea of how frequent such effects are and of the variety of ways in which they are achieved. In Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, Cassandra's hallucinatory vision of the atrocities of the house of Atreus horrifies her, and her report produces emotions of horror and fear ('I **shudder**, and fear . . .', **πέφρικα**, καὶ φόβος 1243) in the chorus who listen to her. In his *Eumenides*, as mentioned earlier, the Pythia's sight of the monstrous Erinyes fills her with horror ('Oh, **horrible** to say, **horrible** to see with the eyes!', ἦ **δεινὰ** λέξαι, **δεινὰ** δ' ὀφθαλμοῖς δρακεῖν 34). In Euripides' *Hippolytus*, a messenger narrates the hero's horrific chariot accident (1219–42) while in his *Medea*, another messenger recounts the deaths of Creon and his daughter in horrifyingly graphic detail (1181–221), the chorus reacts to hearing about Medea's plan to kill her children with a horrified stasimon in which they try to dissuade her from doing so (846–65), and Jason reacts with horrified revulsion when he sees that this is precisely what she has done (1323–36, 1393).[16] In his *Bacchae*, Cadmus and Agave express horror at hearing of the terrible deed that Agave herself has accomplished in killing her son Pentheus and at seeing the horrific sight of the result of that deed: Pentheus' dismembered body.[17]

And so too in Sophocles. For example, his *Oedipus Tyrannus* begins with an appalling account of the plague in Thebes, and later, when the horrific deeds committed by Oedipus in the distant past finally come to light, first Jocasta, then Oedipus himself, and finally the chorus react to learning of them with horror; when Oedipus thereupon blinds himself, the second messenger recounts what has happened in horrifyingly gory detail (1265–79) and the chorus express further revulsion at this new monstrosity that they cannot endure to look upon, so great is their horror ('Such is the **shuddering** that you occasion for me', τοίαν **φρίκην** παρέχεις μοι 1306). In *Ajax*, Tecmessa's detailed account of the mad hero's torturing of the animals in his tent (233–44, 296–310) lends further horror to his first brief insane and blood-stained appearance at Athena's summons and preludes the shocking effect of his extended self-presentation later in the play. In *The Trachinian Women*, Hyllus recounts in short order the agonizing effect of the poisoned robe on Heracles (765–71) and the brutal death of Lichas (777–82). In *Antigone*, the horror of Polynices' unburied body and of the miasma arising from it dominate the first half of the play, just as the horror of Antigone's and Haemon's suicides largely determines the emotional tenor of its second half. And in *Oedipus at Colonus*, the chorus are horrified by the sight of the aged, blinded wanderer, to which they react with language reminiscent of the Pythia's words about the Erinyes ('**Horrible** to see, **horrible** to hear', **δεινὸς** μὲν ὁρᾶν, **δεινὸς** δὲ κλύειν 140–1) and then go on to express further and even greater horror when they learn that the man whom they see standing before them is the very same one who is responsible for the terrible atrocities of which they have heard.

All three of the major tragedians present a number of examples of various kinds of horror related to the appearance of characters and to the actions they have performed. But it is above all Sophocles who explores the tragic possibilities that are offered by the horrific sufferings of the tormented but still living human body in particular, and he does so especially in two plays: *The Trachinian Women*, with its focus in its final episode on Heracles' excruciating agonies and their effect on those around him; and *Philoctetes*, in which Philoctetes' anguished torments dominate the play almost from the very beginning to the very end.[18]

Both plays represent their heroes' horrifically suffering bodies in terms of a number of common features. First of all, the horrific body is that of a celebrated male hero, the protagonist of the play in question. The hero is someone famous in legends, in particular for his ability to overcome opponents, but in this situation he turns out to be entirely unable to overcome his own sufferings. The usually victorious but now vanquished male is a painful paradox both for himself and for others. Second, instead of conquering his torments in action of any sort, he gives himself over to lengthy and desperate laments. Deprived of his usual resource, heroic powers, by a physical suffering that overwhelms his body, he has no other recourse available than verbal outpourings. Third, these verbal expressions take the form not only of iambic trimeters and anapests, but also, and especially, of lyric or *extra metrum* exclamations and of monodies. For example, at *Trach.* 1079–86, Heracles interrupts his trimeters with dochmiac outbursts; at 1003–16 he sings a monody in which dochmiacs yield to lyric anapests. So too, at *Phil.* 730–9 and 781–90, Philoctetes interrupts with *extra metrum* exclamations his exchange in iambic trimeters with Neoptolemus; at 1186–90 he sings a kommos which moves in a few lines from anapests through glyconics to dactyls. Fourth, the hero's sufferings are recounted in the third person by witnesses who report them, but this is not the only or the most striking way that we learn about them. Far more impressive is the fact that they are also visibly displayed in person on stage to the characters, chorus and audience. They are thus experienced not only, less powerfully, in imagination, but also directly and forcefully by vision, and thereby they become far more immediate and compelling. Fifth, these horrific sufferings are witnessed by the other persons and chorus, who can react in different ways – ways which in their difference reveal much about their moral character: with horror, with pity, with indifference, even with contempt. But above all, the sufferings are witnessed by the sufferer himself, who is both a sufferer and a horrified witness and a detailed reporter on his sufferings. Crucially, the horrific body that the characters, chorus and spectators see has not already become a dead and silent corpse, but is still a living body that is suffering unspeakable pains and is able to tell us about these unbearable pains in dreadful detail. Sixth, the horror is not continuous. Instead, a lengthy build-up uses third-person reports and other means to gradually prepare for a sudden climactic visualization which, despite the preparation, remains astonishing and shocking. In *The Trachinian Women*, Deianeira's fearful report of the effect of the ointment on a piece of wool foreshadows Hyllus' detailed account of the sufferings the robe caused Heracles when he put it on; the chorus expresses profound anxiety and dread about what will happen when Heracles arrives on the scene; and then when the hero is finally brought on, silent and unconscious, it is at first uncertain whether he is alive or dead, before he wakes up and breaks into laments and then finally, climactically, reveals his tormented body to the sight of all. In *Philoctetes*, Odysseus provides an account of the events preceding the Trojan War, when Philoctetes was exposed on the island because his presence was so intolerable for the Greek army; then Neoptolemus reports to

Odysseus what he finds in Neoptolemus' cave, crying out in shock when he sees the pus-filled rags lying on the ground that are a first sign of Philoctetes' tremendous disease; and only thereafter does Philoctetes himself arrive, wretched but fully conscious, to describe from his own viewpoint his sufferings and finally, climactically, to endure a new attack of his tormenting pain and to fall unconscious. Seventh, in both cases, the hero's suffering is prolonged and intermittent. It thereby becomes more shocking: its very duration makes it more intolerable for both the sufferer and those who witness it, while its repetition means that one cannot be sure if and when it has finally ceased but instead one is taken by surprise over and over again. Eighth, both torments arise from a superhuman source and cannot be cured by ordinary human means. No doctor can aid Heracles' suffering; and Philoctetes' agonies will only be cured by divine intervention when he arrives at Troy. Ninth, these pains arise not from a combat wound – the kind of injury that would be expected for these martial heroes – but from poison: unseen, subdolous, irresistible. In both plays, the wound is imagined as a ravening beast that devours the hero's flesh. Tenth, in both plays, the torment is so severe that the hero loses his self-control. He implores those present for help, amputation, and/or euthanasia – in vain. Indeed, his suffering is so extreme that he comes close to losing his identity even as a specific person and as a human being. Philoctetes is reduced almost to the status of a wild animal;[19] and Heracles, to that of a woman. And eleventh and finally, the tendency of horror to be a response to the failure of the most crucial limits and boundaries that normally preserve our lives is also expressed rhetorically in the literalization of traditional metaphors: Heracles really does melt and burn with erotic desire, Philoctetes' wound really is a ferocious wild beast that devours him – in such images, the very distinction between literal and figural is annihilated, and with it, the stability of linguistic meaning in general.

There are differences, to be sure, between the presentation of horrific events and sights in the two plays. Above all, in *Philoctetes* Neoptolemus displays in his treatment of the tormented Philoctetes not only, as we (and Odysseus) might expect of him, horror and disgust, but also, at crucial moments, an astonishing equanimity and compassion, and a remarkable nobility of spirit: despite his occasional hesitations and uncertainties, he expresses only rarely any aversion to the disgusting aspects of Philoctetes' illness, and he reacts to the hero's paroxysm and unconsciousness not with dread nor with betrayal but with pity and solidarity. Hyllus in *The Trachinian Women* does what he can to help his tormented father, but he does not have the depth of moral character of Neoptolemus and remains more sketchy as a person; his feeling of pity for his father (and then of frightened and reluctant obedience to the hero's dreadful commands) contrasts with the old man's matter-of-fact, pragmatic admonitions and with the chorus' expressions of horror. But far more important are the numerous similarities between the two tragedies in this regard. We might say in summary that Sophocles seems to give particular emphasis, especially in these two plays but also elsewhere, to the horrors that can happen to the human body, but also and above all to the horror that that suffering body itself can impart to the spectator, both within the play and presumably outside of it.

If this observation is correct, it is surprising. After all, for the Classical tradition, Sophocles is generally thought of as being sweet and harmonious, in contrast with the ruggedly majestic Aeschylus and the everyday and vulgar Euripides. Already for Aristophanes, Sophocles was 'good-natured, easy to get along with', εὔκολος; and it is striking that Sophocles, in marked contrast to Euripides, is almost never attacked by Old Comedy. In general, the Classical tradition tends to sanitize and domesticate Sophoclean horror.[20] Goethe saw this tendency clearly and protested against it in one of his epigrams:

Die höchste Harmonie
Ödipus reißt die Augen sich aus, Jokasta erhängt sich,
Beide schuldlos; das Stück hat sich harmonisch gelös't.
The supreme harmony
Oedipus tears his eyes out, Jocasta hangs herself,
Both guiltless: the play has been harmoniously resolved.
Xenien *327*

Goethe was a world-famous and enormously influential poet; but even his protest was not enough to change the tendency towards attenuation which has characterized so much of the reception of the extreme horror of some of Sophocles' plays.[21] This is manifest especially in visual representations of the plays, especially of *Philoctetes*. Already in antiquity, a marble slab from Brauron before the mid-second century, showing the recall of Philoctetes (Figure 4.3), represents him reclining tranquilly in heroic nudity: he is idle, given that he is not yet participating in martial action, but he displays no visible signs of suffering. In post-Classical art, Philoctetes tends to become a paradigm not of unendurable suffering but of indomitable endurance: he is invariably shown not succumbing to his torments and screaming in helpless pain, but either contemplating his situation philosophically – so for example in paintings by van der Kuijl (Figure 4.4: 1647) and James Barry (Figure 4.5: 1770); or else struggling against it and managing to overcome it with an act of awe-inspiring heroic resolve – so Jean Germain Drouais (Figure 4.6: 1788) and Guillaume Guillon-Lethière (Figure 4.7: 1798). Even if he is shown writhing and contorted, as in a painting by Nicolai Abildgaard (Figure 4.8: 1775), what strikes the viewer is less his agony than the taut beauty of his muscular, athletic body.

It is significant that there is little or nothing quite like this fascination with the horrific body to be found in the surviving plays of Aeschylus and Euripides. Neither of them focuses in their extant works, in the same way as Sophocles does twice in his, upon the still living body of a hero in a condition of horrific torment who cannot help himself from screaming and lamenting his condition. Aeschylus brings funeral processions onto the stage (*Seven Against Thebes*) and corpses that have just been slain (*Agamemnon*, *Libation Bearers*) but he refrains from showing scenes of physical suffering in the course of being enacted. The only exception is *Prometheus Bound*, which indeed is likely not to be entirely or perhaps even at all by Aeschylus: here the opening scene shows Prometheus being

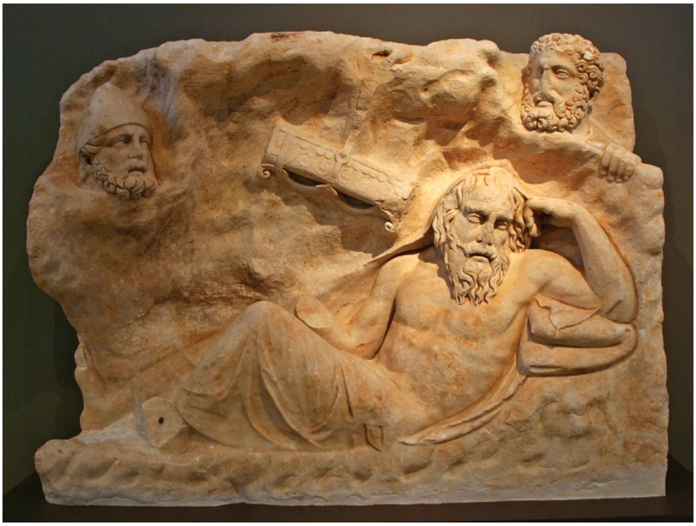


Figure 4.3 Brauron, marble slab with the recall of Philoctetes, before mid-second century.

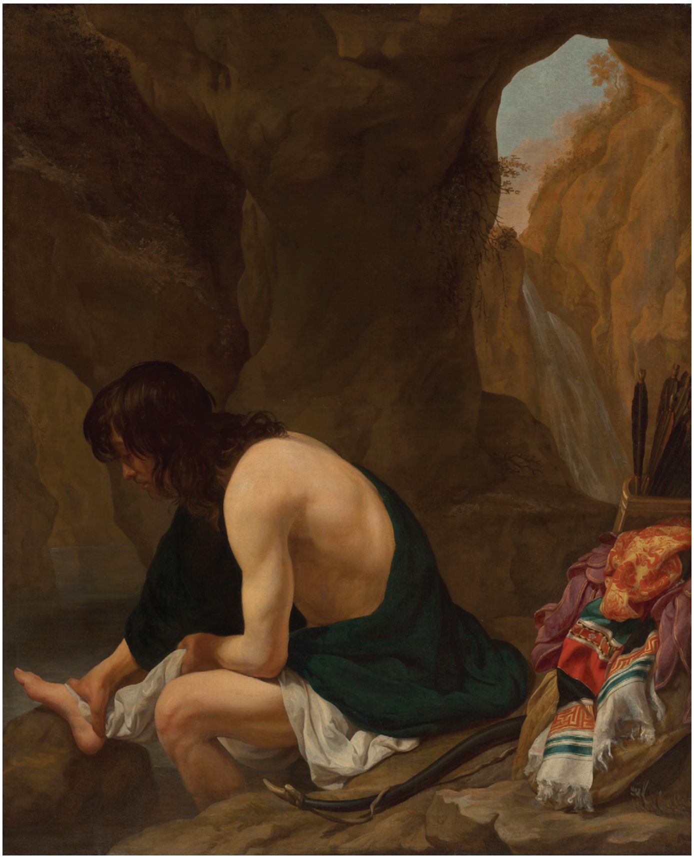


Figure 4.4 Gerard Francksz van der Kuijl, *Philoctetes on Lemnos* (1647).

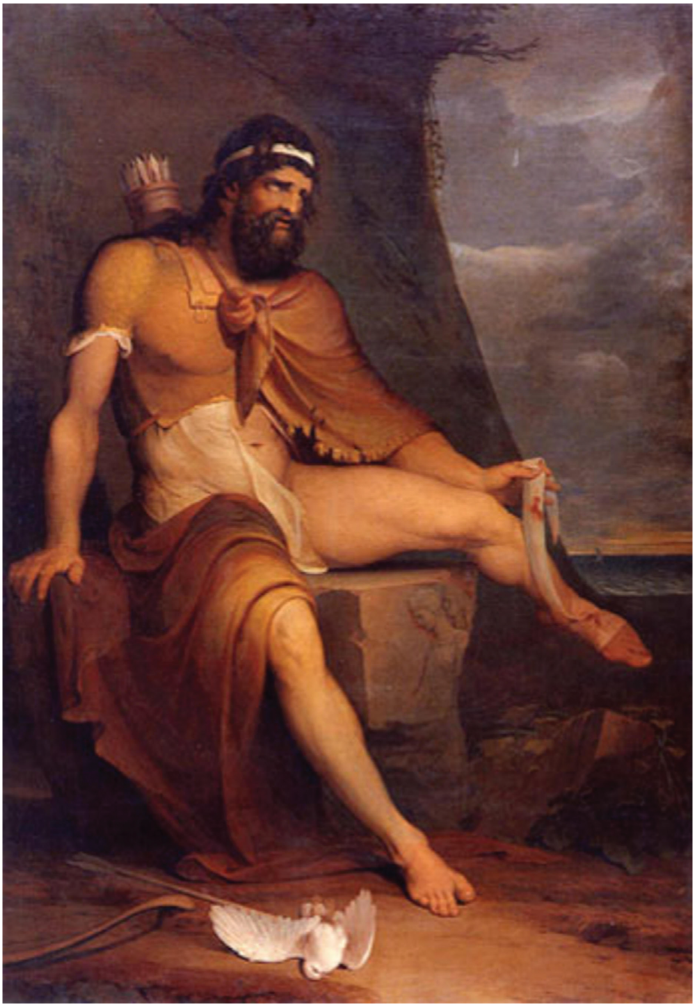


Figure 4.5 James Barry, *Philoctetes on the Island of Lemnos* (1770).

fastened to a crag, but little attention is paid to the actual physical suffering of Prometheus – instead the presentation concentrates upon his tormentors' heartless domination of him. Euripides is fond of funeral processions, which are found in at least seven of his surviving plays (*The Suppliant Women* has five on its own, and *The Phoenician Women* four),[22] but scenes of present suffering are few and far between. In *Hecuba*, Polymestor sings a lament about his blinding by Hecuba, but his aria is brief and our lack of sympathy for him lessens at least somewhat our horror at what he is suffering. The only exception among the surviving plays of Euripides is *Hippolytus*, in which the hero is brought upon the stage dying and laments his pains and impending death in agonized anapests and then a lyric monody (1347–89); but there is not a single expression of horror by any of the other characters present in this scene, as Artemis feels above all anger at Aphrodite and

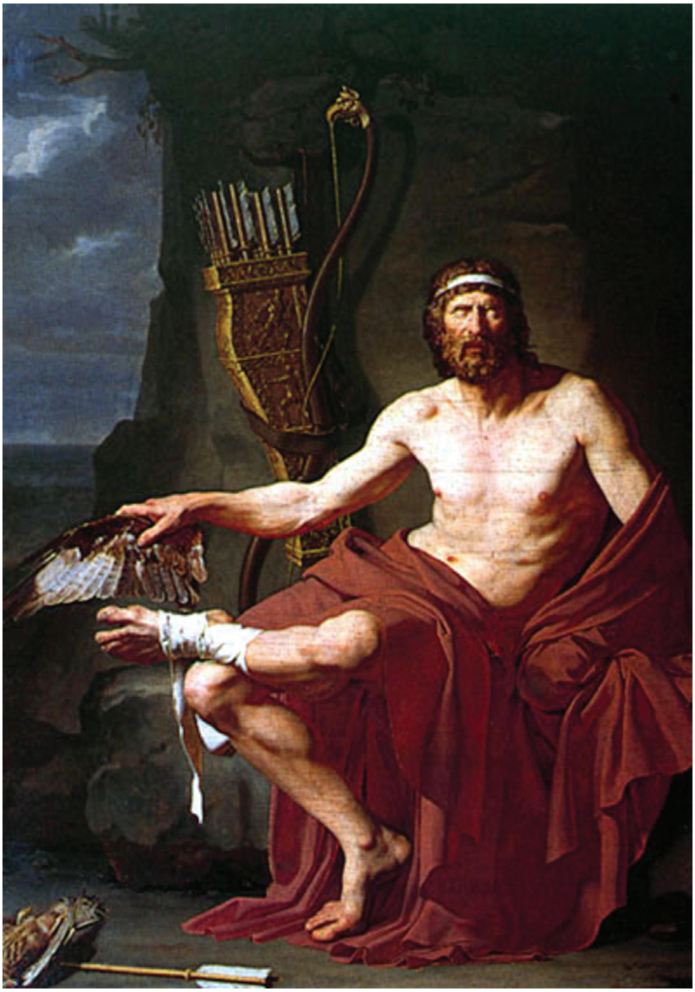


Figure 4.6 Jean Germain Drouais, *Philoctetes* (1788).

regret at losing her acolyte, while Theseus feels guilt for what he has done – these other emotions seem to supersede any possible expressions of horror. In the *Bacchae*, Pentheus has died and been dismembered before he returns to the stage, so he cannot lament himself or express his own horror at his condition; and while it is not impossible that the full original text might have been replete with lamentations and expressions of horror by other people, this section of the play has been swallowed up by a lacuna.

So the question arises of why Sophocles, more than the other surviving Greek tragedians, seems to be so interested in representing the human body surviving, at least for a while, and being tormented by horrific pain. This is not a question that admits a single definitive answer, but perhaps some possible explanatory hypotheses might be suggested, of which one or more might be involved. A first approach might consider Sophocles' well-attested interest in medicine. His expertise in medical matters is clear

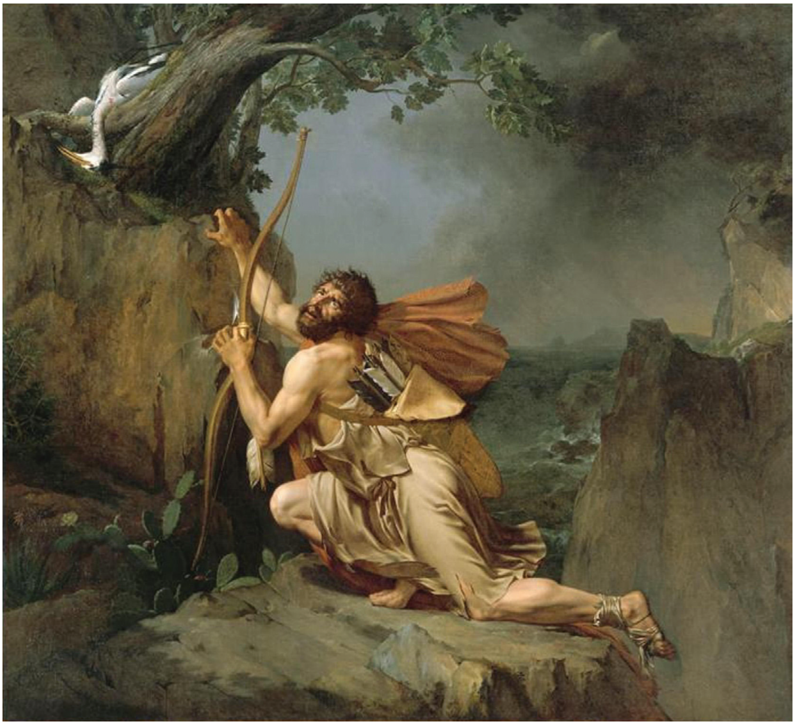


Figure 4.7 Guillaume Guillon-Lethière, *Philoctetes* (1798).

from the medical terminology that is often found in his plays, and it is reported that he hosted the cult of Asclepius and the holy snake in his house while a sanctuary for the newly introduced god was being constructed in Athens. Might this interest have played a role in determining this phenomenon? Certainly that cannot be excluded; but it should be noted that in both of the two cases we have examined, the patients are explicitly said to be beyond the power of ordinary human medicine to cure. Alternatively, we might point to the fact that Sophocles had substantial military experience, unlike Euripides: he was made a general during the revolt of Samos. So he must have had personal experience of horrific battle wounds and seen the demoralizing effects of such injuries upon wounded soldiers and upon their comrades. This too might indeed play a role; and yet neither of the injuries represented in these two plays is at all military in nature. Finally, Sophocles was very interested in theatrical visualization, and his plays are filled with striking visual effects. Might he have seen in the suffering body a potentially highly dramatic source of emotional effect upon his audience? Surely this might well have been the case; and yet we should not ignore the fact that visualization is no less important for Aeschylus and Euripides than it is for Sophocles.

In the end, it may not be possible to find a better explanation than to point to Sophocles' emphasis on the human individual as the locus of the tragic in the world. In Sophocles, the horrific body represents the annihilating invasion of the human dimension

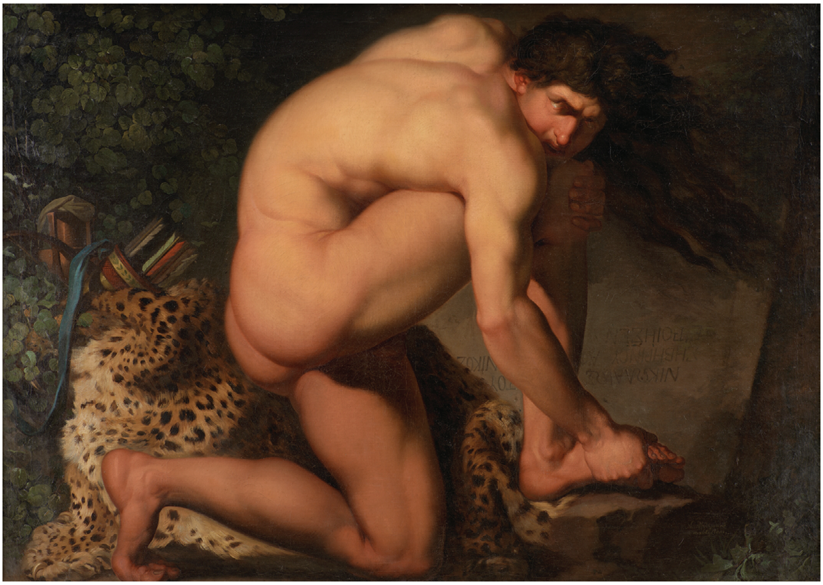


Figure 4.8 Nicolai Abildgaard, *The Wounded Philoctetes* (1775).

by the divine: human contact with the divine realm can result in catastrophic contamination and contagion for the human being who is unlucky enough to experience it. In turn, the human spectators' horror at the horrific human suffering of the tragic protagonist cannot help but remind them of their own human limits. For what all humans have in common is that each one has exactly one body and not more than one body; and if even the extraordinary bodies of heroes can suffer so horrifically at contact with the divine, then what does that tell us about us?[23]

This final suggestion may help us to understand better the otherwise puzzling fact with which we began, that Aristotle entirely ignores horror in favour of pity and fear when he considers the emotional effect of tragedy. For the devastating impact of the divine realm on the human is only one of the fundamental aspects of tragedy that Aristotle tends in general to neglect in his discussion of the genre. Aristotle endeavours to humanize tragedy in the sense of interpreting it as a literary text that represents exclusively the kinds of problems that generally inhere in human action, language and thought, so that it can be analysed satisfactorily with the tools of ethics, rhetoric and politics. He attempts to rescue tragedy from Plato's fierce attack on it by domesticating its effects, attenuating the intensity of the passions it arouses and positing that they are not only incited but also in some way and to some degree relieved, by a process that he calls catharsis but never fully explains. Pity and fear are certainly strong emotions, but they do not put the very identity of the person who feels them fundamentally into question – indeed, fear is often directed towards assuring the safety of that very same person, and pity looks upon other sufferers from the vantage point of relative well-being. Horror is different: it is far more disruptive and potentially annihilating than either pity or fear, more threatening to the very continuity of a person's identity. This may be why Aristotle excluded it, together with the divine realm, from his *Poetics*. We might say that pity and fear can be plausibly claimed to be assuaged by some kind of catharsis, but that authentic horror leaves scars that may well never be healed.

Notes

1.* My thanks for stimulating discussions and suggestions to Lorraine Daston, Paul Eberwine, Stephanie Koerner and Sarah Nooter, and to audiences in Chicago, Berlin and Wollongong.

2. For Aristotle on pity, see his *Rhetoric* 2.5; on fear, 2.8; on catharsis, *Politics* 8.7. Of the over 160 usages of κάθαρσις and related terms in the Aristotelian corpus, three-quarters are medical or zoological, referring mostly to the evacuation of the menses: see Belfiore 1992: 292. See in general LaCourse Munteanu 2011.
3. On astonishment in Greek literature, see Most 2019: 289–91 and more broadly, Lightfoot 2021.
4. Aristotle does not explain here or elsewhere how it is that pity and fear, which he calls types of 'pain' in the *Rhetoric*, can be forms of pleasure in the *Poetics.*
5. It seems most unlikely that this silence is due only to the fact that the surviving version of the *Poetics* is incomplete: what reason could Aristotle have had for postponing his discussion of pity and fear to the lost second book of that treatise?
6. For pity and fear in Greek tragedy, see for example Stanford 1983: 23–7 and 27–9 respectively; by contrast, Stanford mentions horror hardly at all (1983: 34, 106, 149).
7. Kristeva 1980; English translation as *The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), provides some useful and stimulating suggestions on horror. I have found Carroll 1990 to be rather less helpful. See also, more generally, Leder 2016, Lu Hsu et al. 2021, Scarry 1986.
8. On the link between horror and the visual, see Cairns 2017: 53–77.
9. On shuddering, see Cairns 2013: 85–107.
10. Schadewaldt's suggestion 1955: 129–71 that ἔλεος καὶ φόβος should be translated not (as Lessing rendered the terms) as 'Mitleid und Furcht' but as 'Jammer und Schrecken' points in the right direction by increasing the traumatic intensity of the emotions involved, but in fact only increases their quantity without altering their quality, and thus does not really give an account of horror. Besides, his argument does not consider the degree to which Aristotle seems to be toning down the extreme force with which his predecessors Gorgias and Plato had described the effects of pity and fear.
11. On horror and disgust in ancient Latin literature, see the seminal article by Fuhrmann 1968: 23–65. For important discussions of the emotion of disgust, cf. Miller 1997, Lateiner et al. 2017. See also Lateiner 2017: 31–51.
12. See Darwin 1872: 202–7.
13. Darwin 1872: 305.
14. Darwin 1872: 306.
15. So notably in Caravaggio, *Medusa* (1597), Uffizi Galleries, Florence; Edvard Munch, *The Scream* (1893), Nasjonalmuseet, Oslo; and the emoji based on the latter painting.
16. On the question whether Medea's horrifying infanticide is thought of as being a crime against nature, see especially Daston 2002: 376–85.

17. A systematic search of the tragic fragments would doubtless turn up further evidence. For example, Aeschylus reportedly showed Philoctetes trying his best to conceal his pain but failing to do so: Aspasius p. 133.6–10 Heylbut on Arist. *EN* 7.7.6 1150b9; and a fragment of Euripides' *Philoctetes* has the hero warning of what his reaction will be like when the pain strikes him (fr. 789.11). The legend of Philoctetes was obviously well suited to portrayals of horrific suffering and was popular among the Greek tragedians, yet there is nothing to suggest that other tragedians displayed Philoctetes' sufferings quite as horrifically as Sophocles did.
18. See especially Budelmann 2017, here 443–6. On *Philoctetes,* see Männlein-Robert 2014: 90–112.
19. See Thumiger 2020: 95–102.
20. On the reception of these two plays, see especially Männlein-Robert 2014: 97–109 and Budelmann 2007: 446–63; Budelmann's focus on cases that recognize faithfully the pain represented in Sophocles' plays complements my own emphasis here on cases that do not. As noted above (n. 10), already Aristotle in his *Poetics* seems to sanitize and domesticate the extremes of pity and fear that earlier theoreticians attested for the effects of Greek poetry.
21. For the reception of *Philoctetes* in particular, see Alessandri 2009, Flashar 1999: 139–75.
22. The other Euripidean tragedies which include funeral processions are *Hecuba, Bacchae, Andromache, Electra* and *The Trojan Women*.
23. For a different approach to the body in tragedy, with important implications for some of the issues raised in the present chapter, see now Worman 2021; for *The Trachinian Women* cf. especially 37–9, for *Philoctetes* 30–1, 45–6, 163–4.

CHAPTER 5

NAMING THE MONSTER: FORENSIC HORROR AND COLLECTIVE TRAUMA IN CICERO'S *PRO ROSCIO*

Sophia Häberle

The case of Roscius and its historical background

The case of Sextus Roscius junior, a farmer from the rural town of Ameria who was charged with his father's murder in early 80 BCE, is the first criminal trial after the end of the civil war (87–82 BCE) and the subsequent period of unchecked violence. In his first criminal defence speech, Cicero – until then an unknown young lawyer – mobilizes the uncanny and monstrous to give expression to the wound society has suffered, and to enable communication about – and confrontation with – Rome's own most recent past. Reading the *pro Roscio* as horror literature provides a perspective on the role of the horrible within public communication, specifically as a strategy to speak about events too devastating or politically delicate to name them upfront. Further consideration of the aesthetics of trauma woven into the fabric of the horror genre as it is understood in a modern sense might also shed light on the capacity of a constructive force within horror. The environment of the speech, the Forum Romanum, and its setting, a trial, enable a spatialized, contextual type of horror based on visibility, allusion to the past, and the mediation between law and transgression through symbolic language. The term 'forensic horror', as it is proposed in this chapter, aims to put focus on the peculiarity of the interaction of spatiotemporal constitution and juridical environment of the text, which produces a haunting and paradoxical effect anchored in the experience of the collective Roman audience. Two particularly painful aspects of this Roman trauma will be considered: the impact of witnessing violence on memory and identity, and the allocation of guilt under circumstances of legalized murder and civil war.

Within the last phase of the civil war between 83 and 82 BCE, 100,000 soldiers and civilians lost their lives – roughly 10 per cent of the Italian population.[1] Not only due to the sheer number of deaths, but also because of the multitude of conflicts, actors and sites of violence, this first civil war of the first century BCE was destructive for Roman and Italian communities as well as for their individual members. Families and other social networks were torn apart by casualties or political difference, whole cities razed, formerly free citizens enslaved. Sulla assumed his autocratic rule after the death of both consuls in late 82 BCE, formally bringing the war to an end. Among his political measures as an autocratic ruler were an increase of the senate that filled the benches with loyal members of his party, a severe restriction of the power of popular tribunes and the equestrian class (the latter in particular losing access to magistracy), and a full reform of jurisdiction, creating new courts led by praetors and judged by exclusively senatorial juries.[2] But the most notorious and fatal characteristic of Sulla's reign were the proscriptions, which perpetuated the dynamics of civil war violence beyond its official end. After the decisive battle of the Porta Collina on 1 November 82 BCE, uncontrolled lynch mobs were allowed and possibly even encouraged to hunt down everyone they suspected to be opponents to their new ruler. After weeks of horrendous and uncontrolled violence Sulla instated the legalized measure of the proscriptions.[3] This law allowed or commanded everyone whose name was written on an official list published on the Forum to be killed with impunity. Their estate was seized by the state and put up for auction, the original heirs disowned, and their civil rights forfeit for two generations.[4] At first, there were only eighty names on the list, all known as enemies of Sulla.[5] But then, day after day, more names appeared on the white wooden boards. Reading them became a civil event, and it became more and more unpredictable which citizen was saved and which would be sentenced to death by his own name.[6] Private feuds with friends of the dictator, false denunciations, or even a desirable fortune were reason enough, since the *sectores*,[7] auctioneers for the posthumously seized properties, made a good profit from it. The total number of the victims as well as their social and political identity remains unknown, but likely ranges wide into the thousands.[8] Beyond the sheer magnitude of the state-sanctioned murders, their symbolic significance must be noted. The lists, equally similar to premature epitaphs[9] as to public announcements for ordinary auctions of goods,[10] were mirrored in their fear-inspiring conspicuousness by the gruesome display of the severed heads of the victims, left to rot in various places on and around the Forum.[11] The performative exhibition of names, ritualistic and frenzied murders, uninterred corpses, and memory sanctions transformed public space, especially on the Forum,[12] as much as the renovations Sulla undertook after the proscriptions had officially ended in the summer of 81 BCE.[13]

The impact of this time can only be described as deeply traumatic. Rome had changed fundamentally, and Sulla's shadow loomed over the final years of the same state he had been appointed to restitute. It tore deep craters into families of the elite and lower classes, informed the life and politics of survivors like Caesar and Cicero,[14] and served as precedent, almost like a recurring nightmare, for civil wars to come.[15] At the beginning of this last violent phase of the Roman Republic, apart from one other speech[16] the only surviving text of this time, Cicero's *pro Roscio*, attempts to find a language to speak about what happened, to actuate communication in the ruins of public life.

Horror and traumatic communication

'Unspeakable' is a word notably associated with traumatic experience. The violence, grief and social collapse experienced during large disasters or wars defy the faculties of language. Survivors and witnesses struggle to communicate both their individual psychic devastation and the wider ramifications of social, moral and philosophical atomization caused by those cataclysmic events.[17] However, the predicament of traumatic communication is found not only in the difficulty to express unpreceded pain, grief and anger that transcend conventional semantic systems and become unspeakable in the sense that they fail to represent what it was like to someone who was not there. 'Unspeakable' also has a normative value, similar to the Latin *nefas*, the 'offense against divine law, the unnatural, the sacrilege',[18] the thing that should not be uttered. When morals and truths have collapsed and deeds have been committed that are so terrible that legal and social systems of justice and restitution cease to be adequate, language itself becomes polluted. Whether it is trivializing or voyeuristic, cruel or mundane – however the Unspeakable is expressed, it walks a tight rope between complicity, false compromise and perpetuation. After all, the fact of survival is only the starting point of traumatic communication; the main feat is the *ex nihilo* construction of a narrative that can carry a mediation of past, present and future, conveying the 'reality of the wound'*[19] without denying it the possibility of healing, or at least, scarring over.[20]

In that aspect, art (broadly defined as any subjective cultural text aiming for public reception) has been substantial to experiment with, and find, meaningful modes of traumatic communication, to give words to the Unspeakable.[21] Concerning modern traumatic texts, the 'trauma-raddled and wound-obsessed genre'*[22] of horror stands out, due to its global popularity, its productiveness both of new texts and innovative visual and narrative approaches, and its customary transgression of social taboos. Experiences of subjection and loss of bodily autonomy, witnessing or suffering corporal destruction, sadism or indifference of perpetrators, and the radical transformation of spaces are essential themes of horror that reflect traumatizing experiences. Additionally, the aftermath of the horrifying experience, the ongoing trauma which manifests itself as placeless grief, lingering wounds, loss of identity and social context and psychological or psychosomatic symptoms such as dissociation, flashbacks or panic[23] – 'the abject and the uncanny as core signifiers of traumatic historical events'*[24] – are woven into the fabric of modern horror texts. The poetics of horror, such as disjointed narratives, decayed and undead bodies, hauntings, monsters and, of course, depictions of fear, pain and struggle also have a profound effect on the emotions of the audience.[25] This, at times bodily, empathetic response to the reception of horror texts allows for the openness of shock[26] and a general, deeper understanding of the meaning and sense of traumatic experience and psychic wounds. The consideration of the *pro Roscio* as traumatic communication, however, presents some challenges in that regard.

First, it is, at least from the perspective applied in this chapter,[27] part of an internal discourse, a speech by a survivor of a very recent traumatic event directed towards an audience who themselves are survivors, very unlike historiographic and epic texts with their more abstract, more removed target audience.[28] Consequently, the spatiotemporal setting blends present circumstances and subjective memory, relying on extratextual and at times intangible factors that can only be conjectured from the text and adjacent historical and cultural knowledge. In a way, reading the *pro Roscio* as a situated speech removes it from a hermeneutical, interpretational perspective – from what it means to what it feels like.

Second, the historic setting of the speech is rather curious. While it is not entirely clear whether Sulla still held dictatorial power at the time of the process or had already stepped back to a simple *consularis*,[29] it can hardly be argued that the Sullan period of political terror is over. The most horrendous events Cicero must tackle, the proscriptions of 81 BCE, had ended not even one year earlier – assuming the greatest outbursts of violence stopped after the closing of the lists. Latency (the suppression and belated resurfacing of memory) and dissociation (the psychic detachment stemming from denial of the new identity formed by the survival of trauma) are central features of psychological trauma also on a collective level, as Caruth[30] has claimed. Yet, the very early timing of the process sits uncomfortably with these psychoanalytically informed mechanisms of delayed realization. A different perspective, Alexander's 'Cultural Trauma',[31] which contests the transferability of those individual psychological concepts on traumatic processes of the collective, suggests social discourse and negotiation conducted by 'carrier groups' as a prerequisite of trauma on a supra-individual scale. The 'cultural trauma' subsequently is created only through this organized communication of 'master narratives', removing it from psychic wounds and reactions of the individual traumatized subjects. Eckert,[32] who analyses the Roman reception of the Sullan period following Alexander's concept, considers the *pro Roscio* 'den Beginn eines Aufarbeitungsprozesses[33] von Sullas Vergeltungsmaßnahmen in der römischen Gesellschaft'*[34] that extends to numerous trials in the 70s and 60s BCE and further, attempting the restitution of disenfranchised victims and their offspring. But this functional perspective on the *pro Roscio*, while fitting with a historic process of working through cultural trauma, does not seem fully satisfactory to explain the emotional impact and unsettling imagery of the speech as well. As middle ground between those differing perspectives on trauma, the lens of horror literature offers itself as an expression of still unmediated, dreamlike and raw memories and a starting point for the experimental actualization of fractured individual and collective identities.

Third, the question of guilt and legality concerning the overarching problem of Roman civil war is so politically delicate that it cannot be approached directly. Most surviving Romans are, in some way, implicated in the violence, either having participated in the fighting or profited from the widespread confiscations in the aftermath – especially the political elites who are, as members of the jury, the direct addressees of the speech. Thus, while a confrontational approach of the context within which the murder of Roscius senior and disenfranchisement of Roscius junior take place is inadvisable – not only seen from a tactical standpoint but also effectively dangerous for Cicero's career and life[35] – the indirect, allusive and affective rhetoric of horror puts the onus of realization on the audience, who are enticed to join the dots and read themselves into the text.

Eyes removed: or, the forum as haunting memory

Enargeia and the power of speaking terrible things

A haunted place is radically open and radically liminal. Its temporal consistency mixes past with present with future, its visual appearance changes in the most mercurial way and still stays the same. What might seem final and firm, like death, or stone, is not.

What seems to be fleeting, like screams and fire, is. What is the site of haunting in oratory? Within the shared memory and imagination of speaker and audience ghosts can be made to appear. The orator is able to summon the dead (*mortuos excitare*), letting them give evidence of their own murder and demanding revenge.[36] Cicero conjures the horrifying shade of Clodius in the *pro Milone*, trying to scare the judges into being glad that he is, indeed, dead.[37] But a haunting is not necessarily connected to an individual deceased.[38] A place can be haunted by itself, by its past and future meanings, by the scenes, feelings, memories that are shackled to it. Which place, then, contains more memory, more images than the Forum Romanum, this most public and most significant of Roman spaces? It is a well-established truth that the effect of a publicly delivered speech does not only depend on its verbal content, the brilliance of its wording or its persuasive arguments. The emotional involvement of the audience, by inducing disgust, pity, anger or fear is a central concern of forensic oratory, as Quintilian postulates (*inst.* 6.2.1), 'to move the judges emotionally and mould them into the mindset we desire as if we would transform them'.[39] Two categories of emotion are at the orator's disposal: the *ethos*, a rather gentle feeling of empathy, commiseration and helpfulness based in morals and humanity, and the *pathos*, comparable in force and effect with tragedy. Feelings of anger, indignation, fear and hate will, if stirred by a competent speaker, seize the audience's minds beyond their control and make them ferociously partial to his goal.[40] The orator, however, cannot form those forceful words unblinking, he himself must be credibly seen in the grip of the same emotions the audience is projected to feel; he must not only act as, but be, their emotional model. The emotional component of oratory is therefore, according to Quintilian, a shared inner experience communicated between speaker and audience. The medium of this communication[41] is framed as visual: *phantasiai*, or *visiones* as images of the world which exist within individual and collective memory and imagination, can be activated through their verbal invocation to produce an affective connection between speaker and listener.[42]

The close affinity modern horror holds to the impact of this interdependence of language, image and imagination is aptly illustrated in an example Quintilian provides (*inst.* 6.2.31):

> I speak as prosecutor concerning a homicide. Will I not put before my eyes everything that could credibly have happened? Will that murderer not suddenly leap forth? Will the victim not feel dread? Will he scream in terror, or beg for mercy, or flee? Will I not see the fatal strike, the falling body? Will not blood and pallor and groans, and then the final gasp of the dying man be engraved in my mind?

The vividness of this violent scene, the moments of shock, the focus on sounds, bodies and movements have an almost cinematic quality. Quintilian describes this immersive experience as 'an affect not different from what we would feel had we been present in the situation' (ibid.). In addition to the immersive description of scenarios, characters and behaviours, another connection to the extra-lingual world is important for the creation of *pathos*: the interaction with the environment of the speech, its visible milieu as shared space of reference of speaker and audience.[43] This space, especially considering the typical environment of forensic speech, the Forum Romanum, carries an abundance of cultural, historical and political meanings and scenes that can be invoked with only slight gestures and allusions, and be defined as the background for the audience's interpretation. The orator makes use of his environment's 'expressive energy'*[44] which is stored in the collective memory and anchored in associations and experiences of the audience. Each member of the listening collective has seen, read about, identified with, and participated in those scenes of political rallies, funerals, rituals, divine signs, riots, etc. The individual sensory impressions and distinct memories form a collective knowledge of spatial context and can be activated and visualized by the orator's art of *enargeia*.

Staging murder: Enargeia *and forensic space in the* pro Roscio

The spatial conditions of forensic oratory aid the effect outlined above. A trial before the *quaestiones perpetuae* is typically held outdoors in a semi-open space on the Forum, marked only by the temporal structures of the tribunal, where the presiding praetor sits on a wooden dais, and the *subsellia*, benches on the left and right of the *tribunal*, where jury and litigants are placed.[45] In the centre of the court is the stage for the orator who interacts not only with judges and both parties of the process but also with the *corona* of spectators and passers-by that forms around the trial, and the visible surroundings he can point to or imply.[46]

In the *pro Roscio*, the environment of the Forum plays an extraordinary role, even though it is neither the scene of the crime at stake nor in any way important to the case narrative itself. Still, Cicero's construction of the Forum as a space of public justice in the present, and of public violence in the past and – potentially – in the future is crucial for the invocation of horror. From the beginning, the spatiotemporal constitution of the trial is methodically visualized and central for Cicero's methodical set-up. Within the first minutes of the speech (*S. Rosc.* 1–15), Cicero develops the stage on which he acts, assigns roles and characterizations, establishes lines of sight and connections to the wider public. The judges must wonder why young, unknown Cicero stands up, while the more experienced and prominent lawyers in the audience and the senatorial jury remain seated. It is because they fear the consequences and implications of defending a politically charged case: what Cicero says will become the subject of gossip to a lesser degree than if a more prominent attorney would speak when it inadvertently leaks to the wider public, as the *corona* of listeners diffuses into the chattery city. The accusing party is characterized as fearsome and licentious, the accused as destitute and miserable.[47] At the end of the exordium, Cicero emphasizes the critical moment at which the trial takes place and illustrates it by the attention and hope the people of Rome impart on it in an address to the presiding magistrate (11):

> You see the number of people assembled here, you understand the hope and desire of all mortals for severe and strict judgement. This is the first murder trial after a long time of horrible and disgraceful slaughter (*caedes indignissimae maximaeque*).

> Everybody hopes that this court under your presidency will as a manifestation of virtue prevent[48] unconcealed crimes and daily bloodshed (*manifestis maleficiis cotidianoque sanguine*).

At this point, the constitution of spectatorship (between court and public) and time (between present peaceful trial and the violent past without juridical intervention) is marked clearly. The remark on *manifesta malificia* and *sanguis cottidianus*, aimed not at Roscius senior's murder but at the whole recent period of proscription, even indicates a possibility of historic reappraisal. By dealing with this particular crime in public and under the rule of law, as Cicero insinuates, Rome hopefully can come to terms with its past and move ahead into a more stable, just future.

This optimistic vision of the proceedings at hand, however, suddenly shifts to a scene of political terror. If, Cicero continues, the jury cannot keep the accusers' audacious greed in check, it will erupt (12),

> so that not only in secret, but even here on the Forum in front of your tribunal, M. Fannius, before your feet, members of the jury, between those benches (*hic in foro ante tribunal tuum . . . ante pedes vestros . . . inter ipsa subsellia*) murders will be committed . . . those men are accusers who desire nothing more than to slit my client's throat (*iugulare*), this man must defend himself who even had to come to this trial with a bodyguard, so he would not be slaughtered in this very place, before your eyes (*ibidem ante oculos vestros trucidetur*).

The repeated focalization on the forensic stage connects to a scene of brutal violence supported by the graphic, expressive verbs *iugulare*[49] and *trucidare*. Murder on the Forum and the nullification of justice is not a thing of the past any more, as Cicero has suggested shortly before. The danger of witnessing violence is shockingly close, the menace of Sulla's partisans has not lost its terror. Cicero puts his audience on edge, reminding them of this realistic threat of violence and shattering brutally the illusion of normalcy. The fragile demarcation between civil war and republican peace is shattered, the arms might still defy the toga. Opening the forensic stage to violence, no more securely contained in the past, allows for the horror to enter.

Conjuring horror: The past and present of forensic space

Cicero introduces the victim, the father of his client, as an eminent gentleman with connections to the most illustrious families of Rome.[50] Roscius senior has been a staunch optimate, having participated in the civil war (politely referred to as 'that recent disturbance' (*hic tumultus proximus*), 16) on Sulla's side. But the last year of the old man's life is far from peaceful, even after the war has ended (ibid.):

> When victory was established and we all laid down our arms, when people were proscribed (*proscriberentur homines*) and those who were believed enemies

> captured (*caperentur ii qui aduersarios fuisse putabantur*) from all regions, he was in Rome frequently and passed his days on the Forum before everyone's eyes, rather to be seen (*videretur*) as rejoicing in the optimates' victory than as fearing some of the calamity would befall him.

The abundance of passive voice (*proscriberentur, caperentur, putabantur*) in the description of the post-war massacres notably shies away from assigning identifiable actors or perpetrators and produces an uncanny, voracious universality to this epidemic violence. This is mirrored uncomfortably in the presumed reason for Roscius' conspicuous performance on the Forum in front of an anonymous audience (*videretur*). Cicero elides any reference to the gruesome scenes that happen around the old man, which, though not explicitly localized on the Forum, are evoked by the mention of the proscriptions: While Roscius promenades, a crowd of people gathers around the lists trying to find out whether they will survive the day – or whom to murder to get rich quick.[51] Screams of despair and grief fill the air. The living could not care less for the senior gentleman giving his performance of nonchalance. Only the heads of the most prominent captured enemies, exposed right there on the Rostra and other places around the Forum, form a horrible audience for Roscius' desperate cheerfulness, watching with their sightless, rotting eyes.

With this slight, carefully worded allusion to the conditions of public life one year before, Cicero recreates the atmosphere of indiscriminate terror on the forensic stage. Being a survivor himself, he addresses an audience of survivors (whether they stood back or participated in some way). Particularly the members of the senatorial jury, necessarily as favourable to Sulla as Roscius senior was,[52] are likely reminded of their own acts, the fear – or guilt – they felt, the imminent danger to their lives. Even now during the trial they are watched by the *populus* of Rome hoping for severe justice, and by Sulla whose power lingers still. Through his subtle *enargeia* of the Forum in the times of proscriptions within the Forum in times of public justice, Cicero has made the past a haunting vision in the audience's imagination.

Another flashback to the Forum of 82 BCE enhances the indirect, allusive quality of the spatialized horror. Concluding his narration of the case, Cicero revisits the allegation that the accusers have come to the trial with the intention to kill Roscius junior there and then, and equates the intended juridical murder with an explicit act of violence (32): 'Have you come to the jury benches with knifes and swords, so you could either kill or condemn Sextus Roscius right here?' To illustrate this danger, he recounts an incident from 86 BCE (33). Caius Fimbria, a close ally of Marius was 'by far the most insolent man (*audacissimum*) … and, what was the general consensus between all except those who are insane themselves (*nisi inter eos, qui ipsi quoque insaniunt*), the most insane (*insanissimum*)'. During the funeral of Marius on the Forum, Fimbria had made an attempt on the life of Quintus Mucius Scaevola Pontifex, 'the holiest, most untouchable and revered (*sanctissimus atque ornatissimus*) man of our society'. After Scaevola has survived wounded, Fimbria tries to sue him, 'because he has not received the knife with his whole body'.

The connection to the case currently on trial is clear: just as Scaevola, Roscius junior has escaped the attempts on his life by his enemies and is now to be done away with by a juridical murder. In principle, this would be the satisfying conclusion to the anectodical digression, comparing Roscius junior who escapes his enemies' assassination attempts only to be persecuted by them with a capital offence, to Scaevola, and his persecutors (16: *hominibus audacissimis*) to Fimbria (33: *hominem audacissimum*). The audience is made to laugh and to feel scandalized, as they recognize the analogy between the case involving two of the most powerful politicians of their time and a process, at least on the surface, of a much lower profile. They are allowed a soothing self-affirmation: they are the collective of those who are not insane (cf. above: *nisi . . . qui ipsi quoque insaniunt*), the *populus Romanus* appears as a sensible, pious collective, respecting and memorializing their dignified leaders such as Scaevola. But Cicero tears this moment of positive Roman identity apart at its joints and continues the inevitable history of horror.

Four years after the unsuccessful attack, in early 82, a scene of unseen brutality and sacrilege played out on the Forum.[53] An assassination of political opponents was planned by Marius junior, then consul, to take place in the Curia, while Scaevola and other senators he wanted dead were in assembly. Most others were cut down inside the building or at the door, but Scaevola managed to flee across the Forum only to be slaughtered on the steps of the temple of Vesta. His and his fellow victims' bodies were then disposed of in the Tiber, denying them even a funeral or grave. The murder of a man who was not only a most revered statesman striving for conciliation between the opponents of civil war,[54] but also held with his office absolute sacrosanctity,[55] on the steps of the temple that represented Rome's religious fundament like no other constitutes the ultimate *nefas*, a crime symbolically destroying every social and religious bond. Cicero tells the gruesome scene in a subdued, but distressing way (33):

> A thing more ignominious [than Fimbria's lawsuit] the Roman people has never seen – except for the death of this man, which had so much power that this one death destroyed and afflicted all citizens (*ut omnes occisus perdiderit et adflixerit*).

Scaevola's murder here is presented solely through watching its witnesses, the Roman citizens who are going about their business on the Forum when it happens. Within Cicero's words, the audience is not allowed to watch the unspeakable scene itself. They can only gaze at the Romans who are gripped so violently by the sight as if they had been victims themselves, leaving them devastated. Due to the temporal closeness and publicness, there likely is no one in Cicero's audience who does not have a most vivid memory of the murder, either because they were eyewitnesses that day or because they have heard the shocking news. A double gaze is created within the minds of his listeners, the image of the distraught faces of the onlookers provided by Cicero's narration superimposes itself over the traumatic memory of the audience who has borne witness to the deed. This uncanny effect is strikingly similar to Roscius senior's performative unaffectedness (cf. above: 16): While the former perspective removed all identifiable spectators and created a feeling of being watched by the elusive, menacingly hungry collective of potential killers, there are now nothing but spectators, forcing the audience of witnesses to watch themselves watch a ghostly scene that is not allowed to be verbalized. In both cases, an overwhelming feeling of impotent fascination forces Cicero's audience to blend their memories, which are undoubtably traumatic, with the case of Roscius, unable to look away, but unable to really see as well.

Later in the speech, Cicero picks up this allusive horror of the Forum again while tearing to pieces the arguments of the accusing attorney Erucius' indictment and his opponent's person. He mocks (89): 'Cannae has made you quite a good prosecutor', the Battle of Cannae in 216 being proverbial as the worst bloodbath thinkable, the gravest calamity in Roman memory.[56] Then, suddenly, he shifts to a different disastrous battle of the Second Punic War (ibid.): 'We have seen (*vidimus*) many people slaughtered, not at the Trasumenian Lake, but at the Servilian.' While the battle of the *lacus Trasumen*us, where a whole army perished in 217, brought the second Punic war uncomfortably close to Rome, the *lacus Servilius* is a small basin on the northeast corner of the Forum.[57] During the proscriptions, this was one of the sites where the heads of victims were displayed, after the space on the Rostra and Sulla's house had run out. *En passant* during a part of the speech that is otherwise full of witty, hilarious invective against his opposing counsel, Cicero again conjures this horrifying and familiar image in the audience's imagination. The allusion to the heads is therefore again invoked by an *enargeia* in reference to the environment adjacent to the forensic space. But unlike before, the spectators of the unspeakable are made explicit now. In the first-person plural of *vidimus* are included Cicero himself, his direct audience, and the whole surviving population of Rome. Everyone who listens is reminded of their testimony of the horrible evidence of mass murder, and of their own survival by luck or complicity. It is impossible to look away from the horror now.

Subsequently building on the unsettling effect he has just achieved, Cicero returns to the technique he used in the exordium: violence creeps into the very place of the trial and haunts the lawful proceedings. While Sulla was concerned with other more important matters,[58] a faceless mass of unnamed murderers has acted (91)

> as if the state was drowned in eternal night; they ran in the shadows and turned everything upside down (*ita ruebant in tenebris omniaque miscebant*). I am amazed they didn't set fire to the jury benches (*non subsellia quoque esse combusta*), so that there would not be any trace of justice left.

The scenery itself is uncanny and visually disturbing: we see an absent tyrant, an eternal night lit by all-consuming fire, crawling with a horde of ruthless killers whose sole desire is chaos and destruction. The reference to the *subsellia* reiterates the danger uttered in the exordium that Roscius junior might be killed in front of the jury's eyes, connecting violence of past and, potentially, present. But the unreality of the clause also opens space for hope. The horrifying, violent scene, while it manifestly has happened, has not escalated to the worst. The mass of murderers could not kill all who witnessed their deeds. They, speaker and audience, are survivors, they indeed are moving between the jury benches that had almost been destroyed the year before. The space of justice has stayed intact, the eternal night of the state was not, in fact, eternal. And as long as the state exists, justice will exist. This subtle demarcation of the – at least partial – fictionality of the forensic horror achieves an emotional effect somewhat comparable to the exhilarating relief a modern audience can feel when seeing the Final Girl of a slasher movie stab the killer and escape into the light of day, they themselves leaving the dark theatre and rejoining the world. Cicero's audience can finally find constructive, future-oriented meaning in their forensic environment that they were deprived of as soon as he had conjured its horror. But, as it is, trauma lingers. Cicero has demonstrated just how fragile the momentary construct of justice is.

The parricida as a monster of guilt

A painful look in the mirror

What is a trial all about? It is about justice and finding the truth. The accused is innocent or guilty. If it has been established that, in fact, a crime has been committed, e.g. by the existence of a murdered body, the outcome can only be a) the murderer is the person on trial, and will be punished, or b), the murderer is not the one on trial, and therefore absent. A verdict of innocence therefore, while upholding justice, leaves an important aspect of the truth juridically undefined: who really is guilty and therefore deserving of punishment?

Cicero has declared his intention in the exordium that the process should not only prove the innocence of his client but aim for a wider juridical reappraisal of the Sullan period (11, quoted above). This implies the need, however unachievable for political reasons, to make the allocation of guilt the subject of a public, ordered reckoning: anonymous and chaotic violence must be transformed into clearly visible, provable records of crime and restitution. Aside from the pragmatic political reasons that discourage a direct confrontation in 80 BCE, a problem peculiar to the operational mode of the proscriptions makes their juridical treatment even more challenging. As Butler has noted, the bureaucratical process and multitude of actors defies traditional concepts of perpetration and victimhood in that context. The 'displaced, diffused responsibility for the slaughter'*[59] regarding the proscriptions develops an infectious and at the same time abstracting dynamic: Who murdered the victims of proscription? Sulla personally, and his puppet senate? The magistrates and scribes who manufactured and published the lists? The murderers who, at the time, just followed the law? Even the countless snitches, profiteers, onlookers – in short, has the whole people of Rome been complicit in the murder of its fellow citizens?[60] A trial cannot bear the weight of this category of injustice.

But Cicero finds a way to insert the question of – collective – guilt into the speech. As he notes, the process is *de parricidio* (76). The crime of *parricidium*, notoriously hard to define even for Roman legal scholars, denotes a special, grave category of manslaughter, the murder of one's kin (parents, children, siblings), but may take extended meaning even as the murder of fellow citizens.[61] The *parricida*[62] who has been able to commit such a deed defies human nature by breaking the familial bonds that are of highest importance for the social construction of Rome. This qualifies the crime of *parricidium* as an emblem for Rome's propensity for civil war. Parricidal incidents occur frequently in civil war narratives, from Catiline, who is said to have killed his brother, to Cicero's murderer,[63] whom he had defended against a charge of *parricidium* previously. Especially the foundation narrative of Romulus' murder of his own brother serves as an aetiology of the most Roman crime of all.[64] The *parricida* thus provides a canvas for reflection of the sacrilege the Romans commit on themselves by raising arms against each other again and again. When Cicero conjures the *parricida* on the forensic stage as an externalized embodiment of a collective guilt, he confronts his audience with a distorted, horrifying image of their own monstrosity, posing the painful question whether it is possible to mend a self-induced, festering wound that has torn apart the core of the collective.

The monster on trial

Of course, the *pro Roscio* is a defence speech against an accusation of *parricidium*. Cicero's stance is that there is no *parricida* present – or, at least, that his client isn't one.[65] This argumentative gap allows the *parricida* to enter the text like a monster, universal and anonymous, right at the middle of the speech. Both its at times tragical *pathos* and its religious, philosophical perspective let this part stand out from the rest of the argumentation. Quintilian explains this outburst as follows, acknowledging the hyperbolic horror of the text (*inst.* 9.2.53):

> Sometimes, with the technique [of hyperbole] we render implausible crimes so grave as did Cicero in the *pro Roscio*, when he exaggerated the horror (*immanitas*) of *parricidium*, although that horror is obvious, with the force of his speech.

There is, of course, a tactical reason to unleash the cosmic horror of the *parricida* onto the jury. Creating the most dreadful creature possible before their inner eye, a monster in human disguise who spreads a miasmatic infection through the whole universe, pursued by Furies with their flaming torches – the judges will look at that poor sod Roscius, a middle-aged farmer, destitute and scared for his life, and they will find no way to match the monstrous crime to him.[66]

The argument of Cicero's defence (62) is that a crime 'so wicked, so savage, so nefarious' (*tam scelesta, tam atrox, tam nefaria*) as killing one's own parent must leave manifest traces (*vestigia*) to be believed. For one thing, there must be conclusive evidence of character for the culprit's vileness, previous delinquency, and conflagrant hate of the victim, augmented as 'complete madness and insanity' (*summus furor atque amentia*). Also, the crime itself must be traceable in every detail: motive, place, accomplices, sequence of events – neither conjecture nor a single uncertain witness can be allowed if the unspeakable deed, the truth of the *parricida*, is to be believed. The repeated emphasis on the necessity of definite proof for the existence of a *parricida* (62: 'It should not be blindly believed . . . one cannot believe', (*non temere creditur . . . credi non potest*)) achieves a somehow paradoxical effect: in synergy with the image of the innocent farmer Roscius, a monster verging on the phantastic[67] is created. Revisiting the same argument (68), Cicero even postulates that 'the judges must see the hands sullied with paternal blood (*respersas manus paterno sanguine*)', letting the horror of the *parricida* enter the forensic stage in a similar visualization as when he imagined the potential murder of Roscius junior between the *subsellia* (cf. 13, quoted above). The formality of a trial *de parricidio* is a precarious bulwark against the ugly, dangerous truth of crime. To understand and punish it, the judges must see its ugly face that looks uncannily like their own.

The *parricida* must be read from his *vestigia*, his traces, to be believed – but what does he signify? Can senseless murder have a meaning at all? Cicero insists on it, which makes this concept even more terrifying (63):

> It is a most certain prodigy and monster (*portentum atque monstrum certissimum*) when someone has the face and body of a human being (*humana specie et figura*), but is more horrifying than wild beasts because he robs those of the light of day in this abominable way by whom he has received this sweet light . . .

Normally a portent triggers a public religious procedure with the purpose to acknowledge it formally, interpret its meaning and expiate it to avert whatever calamity it bodes.[68] Whether it is a thunderbolt hitting a cult site, a calf with two heads, or a prophetic dream – the pious observance of the ancestral rites should restore the peace between gods and state. When the ruinous event it has foreboded happens anyway, the demonstration of *pietas* performed by the citizens must have been lacking. A *monstrum*, however, must be recognizable. A corporal abnormality or an inexplicable natural phenomenon, for example, are easily understood to hold divine significance. The monstrousness of the *parricida*, in contrast, is more subtle and more horrifying: he looks completely normal, he has led a normal, albeit scandalous and delinquent human life – his true monstrosity presents itself only in hindsight. This must make the audience wonder: 'How many of my fellow Romans, who evidently in the last years have shown their ruthlessness and cruelty, will prove to have been monsters instead of humans? And will, consequently, I have been one of them?'

The association between divine signs, monstrousness and civil war is spelt out when Cicero describes the official punishment for kin-murder (71–2): the *poena cullei*.[69] In a ritual procedure that reminds more of a *procuratio prodigii* than retributive justice,[70] convicted *parricidae* are 'sown into a sack and thrown into a river alive'. The concept of a *homo sacer*, a person who is deemed belonging to the sphere of the divine and therefore untouchable for humans, is as two-sided as the meaning of the word *sacer* itself. On the one side, it applies to magistrates like the *pontifex maximus* or the popular tribunes whose bodily integrity is so crucial for the civil-religious coherence that violating it is an ultimate act of *nefas* – a *nefas* that has occurred frequently in the previous years, from the Gracchi to Scaevola. On the other side, a person so touched by the divine, so inhuman, emits a danger on a cosmic level. Similar to a *fulmen*, the place a thunderbolt has struck, which must be interred and walled in to control its divine destructiveness, the *parricida* too must 'be removed and ripped from all nature . . . heaven, sun, water and earth'. The effect the monstrous body would hold if treated like the bodies of other criminals or enemies seems almost like an infection: wild beasts would become more horrifying (*immaniores*) after consuming him, the sea if touched by him directly without the protective *culleus* would lose its purifying quality. The high pathos of the section and the invocation of natural elements, humanity and the divine mark a tangible cosmic disturbance. Like a civil war, it is probably too big for justice.

The wound of guilt

Abruptly, having postulated the need of proof for the conviction, Cicero launches into a precedent case (64), quickly transforming the juridical premise into a deeply unsettling mystery. Some years ago, Cloelius, a 'non-obscure man' from Terracina,[71] went to sleep one night in a in a locked room together with his two young sons. The next day, the boys were found peacefully asleep, their father lying next to them dead with his throat slit. The sons became, of course, the primary suspects – no one had been seen entering or leaving the room during the night. They were tried *de parricidio* but acquitted unequivocally. Nobody, as the jury argued, could 'after he had polluted all human and divine laws with that nefarious crime' fall asleep next to the corpse, rather he 'would not even be able to breath without terror'. The mystery of Cloelius' murder remains unsolved within Cicero's narrative. No traces are left behind, no names can be connected to the crime, no one bears witness to the deed. Like a ghost, someone took a life and vanished, demonstrating the limits of truth and justice. Cloelius' case, and Roscius senior's which it mirrors regarding the ultimately unknown identity of his killer, ties back to the central problem of historical reappraisal and the aftermath of civil war: the collective guilt is unbound by the corporal reality of a murderer. In that, the ghostly killer echoes the feeling of anonymous violence in the Forum and the faceless mass of killers that leaves behind nothing but severed heads and wrong accusations.

Next to the forensic, another genre is dominantly occupied with the question of responsibility, guilt, and the consequences of crime: tragedy.[72] Cicero reminds his audience of an unspecified tragic plot (66):[73] a son is ordered urgently by divine powers to kill his mother in retribution for the murder of his father, 'but yet, the Furies chase them, and they cannot bear to rest, because not even a pious man can survive the deed without becoming guilty (*sine scelere esse*)'. The mention of the piousness and obedience of divine commands exhibited by the tragic *parricida* sits notably uncomfortable with those in the audience who have themselves fought in the civil war. The idea of the restitution of the republic, the declaration of Roman adversaries as external *hostes*, and the ostentative, brutal revenge of the proscriptions proves a moral dilemma without solution. Even if nothing could have been done different, if all bloodshed under Sulla would have been necessary and according to the will of the gods, the guilt is indelible.

Cicero moves the tragic horror from the moral dilemma mapped in the plot to the application of its imagery for the consideration of the psychological impact of *parricidium*.

The phantastic breaks into the real world, transforming the safe distance of the stage with its promise of Aristotelian *katharsis* into an intimate and merciless depiction of a torturous emotion (66):

> So it is, judges: The blood of mother or father holds great power, great force, and great obligation. When from this blood a stain (*macula*) is received, it cannot be washed away, rather it infiltrates the spirit, so that it results in complete madness and insanity (*summus furor tque amentia*). You should not believe that, how you have seen it often in plays, those who have committed something impious and criminal, are scared and chased by the burning torches of the Furies. No, by his own treachery, his own terror, he is tortured.

The motive of blood, previously framed as a binding, universal force of familial relationships (63: *communio sanguis*), re-emerges as a poisonous, burning substance reminding of the blood-magic of Medea and Deaneira, those two tragic, irredeemable kin-murderers. A searing, infectious substance, the parricidal blood burns its way into the inner core of the one who shed it. It is not the divine Furies with their burning torches and their promise of reconciliation who hunt the *parricida*. When removed from the theatre, their power morphs into a pathogenic force of the psyche, the crime becomes the essence of the criminal. His insanity is a vicious circle, the *summus furor atque amentia*, beforehand a prerequisite for the ability to commit *parricidium*, now becomes the result of the crime, the parricidal guilt spreads through the murderer's existence like an infection. Cicero speaks a harsh truth: even if the order of things is seemingly restored, like the House of Atreus at the end of the Eumenides, or the *res publica* of Sulla, the wound of murder is too deep to really scar over. *Parricidium* changes the essence of the Roman self and permanently alters identity. The *Furiae domesticae*, as much internal psychological force as vengeful ghosts of murdered kin, continue to haunt and hunt.

Conclusion

Ultimately, Roscius junior is acquitted. We never learn whether he gets back his inheritance, whether his father's name is deleted from the lists, whether the true murderer is ever found. Chrysogonus and the Titi Roscii are never heard of again, Sulla retires to private life and dies only two years later, prodigiously, of an infestation of rot and mites. Cicero goes on to become, at first, the most famous orator whose voice is ever heard on the Rostra, then, the most famous victim of the triumviral proscription whose head is exposed at the same place. He himself cannot escape the horror of the Forum – and neither can the Romans. But nonetheless, in the *pro Roscio*, there is a shimmer of hope, of constructiveness to be found. Young Cicero's palpable optimism stemming from his trust in the resilience of juridical institutions and his audience's collective willingness to be moved into reconciliation by his words outlasts the disenchanting course of history. The constructive meaning of horror lies within its power to say what otherwise is too terrible to be expressed, and to offer the relief of collective re-narration against the insulating trauma and parricidal guilt – even if deep chasms remain.

One question, however, remains to be addressed at the end of this chapter: Why should we give this phenomenon the name 'horror', or even invent a new subcategory of 'forensic horror' for it? How can this be productive for a further discussion of the Roman discourse on civil war? I want to offer three general perspectives at this point.

First, the *pro Roscio* appears as the ideal starting point to observe the development of a narration of civil war horror to civil war Horror (with a capital H) as it has been observed in later (imperial) Latin literature – as a set of motives, psychological strategies, standard scenes etc. which express and re-narrate the traumatic experience of civil war, spanning generations and radical political and literary changes. Mapping out the close relation and, even more, the radical shift between the subtle creepiness of Cicero's Sullan Forum and, e.g., the universal bloodbaths and unhinged bodies of Lucan as part of a continuous discourse on Roman memory and identity under the term 'horror', and therefore connecting it to contemporary artistic and scholarly works, will deepen the understanding and yield interesting perspectives on this historical and literary area (and hopefully also add to the interdisciplinary, transtemporal discussion of horror).

Second, it might deepen the understanding of Cicero's rhetorical strategy of situated fear – which is not simply aimed at the manipulation of the audience into political or juridical compliance, but rather at the creation of a collective which is participating emotionally and intellectually in an act of self-realization. The possible affinity to reception processes of, at the one hand, (Greek and Roman) tragedy, and on the other, contemporary horror, as they relate to, e.g., emotional regulation and renegotiation of identity offers an additional perspective on the 'Sitz im Leben' of this kind of literature – as spoken or written oratory, in Cicero and beyond.

Third, the Forum Romanum as a repository of interconnected memories, situations and texts emerges in a different light when the Ciceronian *enargeia* is considered not insulated (as references to topography and its history, or the staging of forensic or political drama), but, under the double meaning of 'forensic horror' as outlined above, as a uniquely contextualized communication about the fear, guilt and violence inherent to the participating Roman collective. Most of what this might entail stays unexplored in this chapter (themes peculiar to the *pro Roscio*, e.g. a pervasive doppelgänger-motif or the mirrored unsettlement of landscape between Rome and Italy; and especially the continuous development of this category over the whole span of Cicero's oratory) – but waits to be unearthed and to add a facet to this, in every sense of the word, monstrous space.

Notes

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1. Eckert 2016: 140–6 gives a chilling summary of the estimated number of victims involving battles, occupations massacres of captives, lynch mobs and proscriptions.
2. Cf. Steel 2014: 657–68 for a contextualization of Sulla's senatorial policies and their effect on the court juries and other magistracies. For an overview on the Sullan reforms of the legal system cf. Broughton 1984: 74–5; for context cf. also Keaveney 2005: 140–55, Capogrossi Colognesi 2014: 194–213.
3. The timeline, legal background, and motivations behind the Sullan proscriptions are, due to late and inconclusive sources, a subject of controversy. For an extensive and systematic reappraisal of sources Hinard 1985 remains fundamental. For the reappraisal of the chronology *contra* Hinard I follow Heftner 2006. Cf. also Keaveney 2005: 124–39, Santangelo 2007: 78–87, Henderson 2003. Notable historiographic sources are e.g. Plut., *Sulla* 31–2; Cass. Dio fr. 109, App. *civ*. I 95.
4. Cf. Hinard 1985: 17–29, 32–5, 67–100 for different aspects of the legal framing of the proscriptions and the proscription edict.
5. Ibid. 118–19.
6. This emblematic scene of fatal reading and epigraphic symbolism has inspired most vivid and impressive scholarly prose in modern times, demonstrating the psychological hold Sulla's horrible innovation has even today. For notable examples cf. Butler 2002: 6–9, Flower 2006: 90–2, Henderson 2003.
7. OLD: 1719, s.v. 2.: 'One who buys up captured or confiscated property in a public auction with a view to reselling it' from *secari*: to cut i.e. to divide the confiscated land. Cicero points to the double meaning of the word in a gruesome pun (Cic. *S. Rosc.* 80): 'Do we not know that in these times [i.e. during the proscriptions] the cutters of throats and properties were the same people?' – *(nescimus per ista tempora eosdem fere sectores fuisse collorum et bonorum*?).
8. It might be important to note that while the individually known proscription victims largely consist of prominent magistrates and members of the Roman and municipal elites, the number of unnamed and non-elite victims must not be underestimated, considering the capital punishment for anyone who attempted to save or hide the proscribed – among them undoubtedly dependent women, impoverished clients, *liberti/ae* and enslaved persons. Their names do not appear in any list.
9. Butler 2002: 7.
10. Flower 2006: 92.
11. Primarily on the *rostra*, but also the *lacus Servilius* (Cic. *S. Rosc.* 89, cf. below) and the house of Sulla himself (Val. Max. 3.1.2b; Plut. *Cato minor* 3) are mentioned.
12. Flower 2006: 93 aptly characterizes Sulla as 'a highly successful innovator in the field of memory sanctions', combining the public annihilation of his opponents (interdiction of funerals and funerary monuments, erasure of votive inscriptions etc.) with visually impactful reconstructions in central public spaces (i.e. mainly on the Forum), and a multimedia self-fashioning as founder of Rome, demarcating an entirely Sullan New Republic.
13. The complete renovation of the *rostra/comitium* complex, the rebuilding of the *curia*, the construction of permanent buildings to host the new *quaestiones perpetuae* as well as statues of the dictator on prominent places and the – only posthumously completed – rebuilding of the incinerated temple of Jupiter on the Capitol, cf. van Deman 1922: 1–3, Coarelli 2010: *passim*, Vasaly 1993: 62–3.

14. Cf. for Sulla's impact on Cicero Diehl 1988, for Sulla's impact on late Republican political actors in general cf. Rosenblitt 2019.
15. Most notable the *aliquis*-speech in Lucan 2, 67–232. Cf. Thorne 2016: 83 n. 12 for bibliography and *passim* for further discussion of the speech as traumatic communication by an eyewitness.
16. Cicero's *Pro Quincto*, cf. Butler 2002: 9–14.
17. The study of cataclysmic events, their collective psychological impact and the challenge unspeakable crime poses on the sober nature of scholarship is rooted in the study of the most immense crimes against humanity of the twentieth century, before all the study of the Shoah. A more extensive appraisal of this important area cannot be undertaken here, but as a starting point, LaCapra 2010 is fundamental, cf. also Thorne 2016: 82 with n. 10.
18. OLD: 1167, s.v. *nefas*.
19. Thorne 2016: 78.
20. For the subversive notion of constructiveness connected to *nefas* for Lucan cf. Kappacher (forthcoming).
21. A brief survey of classical scholarship on trauma can be found in Thorne 2016: 83 n. 11. Among the more recent additions, Karanika/Panoussi 2020 stands out, representing a wide range of collective and individual traumatic experiences in various literary genres.
22. Blake 2008: 2.
23. Cf. Fischer and Riedesser 2009 for an extensive overview of origins, symptoms and treatment of psychological trauma. Cf. Flatten et al. 2004: 20–50 for overview of various definitions and symptomatic classifications.
24. Blake 2008: 3.
25. Cf. Smuts 2014 for an introduction to the analyst-cognitive approach to reactions of horror audiences.
26. Cf. Lowenstein 2005.
27. The speech likely was published as text not long after the process, cf. Dyck 2010: 19–20. The reception of the written text by audiences more distant to the historical and spatial context of the process and therefore not part of the traumatized collective, while still able to participate in the communication of shock, horror and grief, differs from the immediate effect of the situated horror of the process.
28. Without expanding more on this (cf. the conclusion of this chapter), the exploration of horror in imperial literature is producing important scholarship recently, cf. Estèves 2020, Hömke (forthcoming), Cruz (forthcoming). I thank Dr Cruz for providing me with the final draft of her fascinating manuscript, which would warrant further exploration also within the scope of my own theme. For Lucan especially, Walde 2011 must be mentioned, although she does not connect it explicitly to horror literature (cf. Thorne 2016 for this).
29. Cf. for difficulties of dating of Sulla's abdication Eckert 2016: 190–3 with n. 101.
30. Cf. Caruth 1995: 1–5.
31. Alexander 2004.
32. Eckert 2014; 2016; 2020; 2023.
33. The notion of *Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit*, or historical reappraisal opens an especially interesting and controversial perspective on the social discourses after an event that could in recent categories be defined as a crime against humanity. Further consideration of the question whether there might be a – however preverbal – need to formulate an

identificational narrative of guilt and responsibility in a pre-modern society parallel to the discourse of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries will be a topic worthwhile of careful future exploration. Klooster and Kuin 2020 and Dinter and Guérin 2023 offer several approaches to the complex politics of civil war remembrance and recovery in Greece and Rome. Steel 2023 explicitly engages with memory in the *pro Roscio*.

34. Eckert 2016: 154.
35. The analysis and classification of the political position of Cicero in the *pro Roscio* and whether he undertook some kind of risk by speaking critical of the omnipotent Sulla has been subject of controversy. While many earlier commentors see a gap between Cicero's later condemnation of Sulla as tyrant and the exonerating remarks in the *pro Roscio* (cf. for bibliography Buchheit 1975: 575), '*Raffinement . . . Nadelstiche*' (ibid. 576) and '*Ciceros indirekte Methode der Kritik*' (Diehl 1988: 86, cf. ibid. 85–117 for an extensive analysis) are recognized as a courageous and risky expression of opposition – strategically interwoven with a moderate optimate inflection (cf. Riggsby 1999: 65) providing the young Arpinate advocate with plausible deniability for Marian sympathies.
36. For the rhetorical *topos* of *mortuos excitare* and its various purposes cf. Dufallo 2007: 13–35, esp. n. 2 for loci.
37. Ibid. 30–2; referring to Cic. *Mil.* 79, 91.
38. While there are various terminological nuances and functional species of ghosts, dead-spirits and apparitions in Greek and Roman literature and religion, they are almost always tied to the former corporal existence of a human being which they represent. A haunted place generally proves to be connected to the deceased person or the presence of their remains, cf. Felton 1999: 22–37.
39. All translations from Latin my own.
40. Cf. for theories of fear in classical oratory Vasaly 1993: 96–8, Maggiorini 2015, Le Penuizic 2015.
41. Cf. for philosophical background of aesthetics Vasaly 1993: 96–8 with nn. 15, 17, 19.
42. Vasaly 1993: ibid.
43. Cf. Vasaly 1993: 40–87 for an impressive exploration of this rhetoric technique in the Catilinarian speeches.
44. Ibid.: 61.
45. For the standard construction of a republican Roman *tribunal* and its position on the Forum cf. Kondratieff 2010; for the theatre-like set-up and its rhetorical utilization cf. Hall 2014: 20–7. It must be noted that in 81/80 BCE large parts of the Forum were under construction due to Sulla's extensive remodelling of the *rostra*/*comitium*/*curia* complex (a preferred space for tribunals), and the new construction of a permanent building for the *quaestiones perpetuae*, cf. Coarelli 2010: 178–82. Therefore, while certainly somewhere on the Forum, the exact site of the *pro Roscio* and, consequently, the implication of monuments directly visible to the audience must remain speculative.
46. Cf. Hall 2014: 24.
47. Cf. Vasaly 1985 for theatricality and the use of dramatic stock characters in the *pro Roscio*.
48. The textual transmission of this passage is corrupted and demands conjecture. Here I follow Dyck's reading (cf. Dyck 2010: 75).
49. Hinard 1985: 41 remarks that in the context of proscription narratives '*iugulare* a pu servir de substitut à *proscribere*' due to the excessive cruelty of the acts of murder themselves and their dramatic staging in historiography.

50. The role of those elite families, namely the Metelli, Servilii and Scipiones, who are repeatedly invoked during the speech, is conspicuous. Syme 2016 takes this to indicate a burgeoning opposition of a younger generation of nobiles against the Sullan regime, who employ the new man Cicero to do their bidding.
51. Plut. *Sulla* 31 relates the emblematic anecdote of one Quintus Aurelius, a private and apolitical landowner who unexpectedly reads his name on the list, uttering 'Poor me, my Alban estate is prosecuting me' before being murdered right there.
52. Steel 2014 demonstrates how the various measurements and reformations of the Senate under Sulla, driven by an unmatched number of senatorial and consular victims of civil war and forced conformity to the new regime and, on the other hand, the need for an increase of jurors of senatorial rank to fill the newly established courts, resulted in a Senate composed at of least two-thirds of 'new members whose qualifications for being chosen included their loyalty and commitment to Sulla and his regime and whose prior experience of participation in the *res publica* was in many cases limited or even non-existent' (2014: 666).*
53. Cf. App. *civ.* 88 for an elaborate account, which however omits the detail of the site of murder being in or in front of the temple of Vesta, attested in e.g. Cic. *N.D.* 3.8. and Liv. *Per.* 86., and staged most poignant in Lucan 2, 126–9.
54. For Scaevola's role as role model and mentor for Cicero cf. Diehl 1988: 19–22.
55. Cf. Eder 2006.
56. Cf. Diehl 1988: 92 and Eckert 2016: 168 for the association of Sulla and Hannibal.
57. Platner 2015: 314.
58. An example of the subtle but biting critique of Sulla in the speech, cf. Buchheit 1975: 585.
59. Butler 2002: 7.
60. Mehl 2014 demonstrates this dichotomy of trauma as victim and as perpetrator inherent to civil war in Tacitus' portrayal of the senatorial class under the principate.
61. Cf. Cloud 1971: 1–66 for a detailed discussion of legal and etymological aspects of this crime.
62. Due to the dual meaning of the English 'parricide' referring to both the crime and the perpetrator, I use the distinctive Latin forms, cf. for problems of terminology Cloud 1971: 1–2.
63. An extensive study of this phenomenon remains a desideratum. To mention some prominent examples: the Sullan partisan and murderer of his own children and wives Oppianicus in Cicero's *pro Cluentio*; Catilina as murderer of his child (Sall. *Catil*. 15, 2–3; Val. Max. IX 1,9) and brother (Plut. *Sulla* 32); Cicero's murderer Popilius Laenas as a man previously accused of *parricidium* and defended in court by Cicero (Plut. *Cicero* 48); the list of murdered relatives in Lucan 2, 148–51.
64. Cf. Wiseman 1995: 143–4 for the emergence of the myth of Romulus' fratricide as a reaction to internal conflict.
65. Riggsby 1999: 55–9 observes the judging paradigms Cicero suggests to the jury, pointing to the contrast of mere suspicion pertaining to his client's aleged guilt as opposed to the perspicuous crime committed by the true culprits. However, differing slightly from Riggsby's stance that Cicero argues explicitly for the guilt of the accusing party and the freedman Glaucia as the true murderer, I read the counteraccusation as more implicit, i.e., Cicero suggests certain characteristics and vices of the universal *parricida* as similar to his characterization of the accusers. The murder of Roscius senior remains, within the speech, ultimately unsolved.
66. Cf. for the *parricida* as antithesis to the characterization of Roscius junior, Vasaly 1985: 6.

67. For the phantastic in Latin literature and its relation to horror cf. Hömke 2006.
68. Cf. Rosenberger 1998 for a comprehensive survey of Roman *Prodigienwesen* and especially ibid.: 91–126 for paradigms of interpretation and connection to calamities of the state.
69. Cf. for dating and application of the *poena cullei* Cloud 1971: 26–38, Briquel 1980. For animals as part of the ritual, which Cicero does not mention, cf. ibid.: 87 with n. 5.
70. Cloud 1971: 34–6.
71. Wiseman 1967 identifies this Cloelius with a known moneyer from the region and father to a Marian general. This prosopographical observation on the one hand explains the remark *non obscurus*, on the other hand also suggests one of the sons as a key actor in the conflict of Marius and Sulla, conjoining *parricidium* and civil war once more.
72. Dufallo 2007: 36–52 provides an excellent analysis of Cicero's 'tragic universe' (36); for the *pro Roscio* cf. ibid.: 38–44.
73. The most prominent example is Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, esp. the Eumenides, which is widely known to the Roman audience. The plot also applies to the myth of Alcaion, dramatized both by Accius and Ennius in Rome, cf. Dyck 2010: 132. It is notable that Cicero's allusion remains abstract, furthering the suggestion of anonymous universality of the *parricida*.

CHAPTER 6

FEARFUL LAUGHTER: BODILY HORROR IN ROMAN SEXUAL HUMOUR

Jesse Weiner

Introduction

While horror may be a modern construct – at least from the standpoint of genre – horror, defined as an intense emotive mix of fear and disgust, most certainly existed in Graeco-Roman antiquity, as several of this volume's chapters speak to with their focus on blood, guts and the body.[1] We might think of Lucan's Erichtho episode (*BC* 6.413–830) and grotesque depictions of Medusa and of deaths-by-snakebite while Cato's army marches across Libya (*BC* 9.619–889), Pliny's ghost story letter (*Ep.* 7.27) and Aeneas' account of the sack of Troy in *Aeneid* 2, which prefaces the tale with the verb *horreo* (*quamquam animus meminisse horret luctuque refugit*, 'Although my mind bristles to have remembered and withdraws in mourning'; *Aen.* 2.12).[2] In the case of Lucan and Pliny, each author incorporates the body into their narratives. The latter emphasizes that the ghost haunting Athenodorus' home appears emaciated and squalid with a long beard and bristling hair (*Ep.* 7.27.5); the former dwells upon the gory details of bodily putrefaction caused by venomous snakebites. And, in another direction, we notice the language of horror written into Roman humour and writing about sex across multiple genres, spanning both poetry and prose across medicine, novels, satire, comedic drama, erotic verse, etc. For example, in Petronius' *Satyricon*, Encolpius reports from Quartilla's lair that, 'Then indeed, all courage fled us, horrified, and certain death began to cloud the eyes of us poor souls' (*tunc vero excidit omnis constantia attonitis, et mors non dubia miserorum oculos coepit obducere*'; 19), and that 'She rubbed my crotch, now frozen with a thousand deaths' (*sollicitavit inguina mea mille iam mortibus frigida*; 21).[3]

Anca Parvulescu observes that 'in the twentieth century, laughter was often imagined as a way into horror'.*[4] 'If laughter is a bit of the real, it is invoked in relation to joy, but also often of horror.'*[5] Jonathan Lake Crane suggests of 'the contemporary horror film' that the genre 'moves from laughter to terror with unsettling ease'.*[6] And Linda Badley joins horror and comedy as modes that 'focus on bodily spectacle'.*[7]

I am intrigued as to whether bodily horror – or at least something closely related to it – can be found in ancient comedic literature, which makes its own spectacles of bodies subject to violence. As a preliminary gesture towards an answer of 'yes', I note Apuleius' observation early in the *Golden Ass* (1.12):[8]

> Then I perceived how certain emotions naturally come forth as their opposite. For just as tears often spring forth from joy, so too in that excessive terror I could not stifle a laugh over Aristomenes turned into a tortoise.

> tunc ego sensi naturalitus quosdam affectus in contrarium provenire: nam ut lacrimae saepicule de gaudio prodeunt, ita et in illo nimio pavore risum nequivi continere, de Aristomene testudo factus.

Along these lines and in association with Apuleius, Mary Beard notes a tradition of 'death by laughter'* in Roman literature and culture.[9] As Chiara Thumiger observes, both laughter and tears were considered, in antiquity, to be 'potentially pathological'.*[10]

To be clear, I here treat both horror and comedy as modes of discourse and emotion, rather than in strictly generic terms. I examine Roman humour – primarily what we would now describe as 'shock humour' – and its depictions and threats of sexual violence, often at the hands of bodies marked as deformed or undesirable in some way. Like horror, Roman sexual humour depends, as John R. Clarke has shown, upon transgressive violation of physical norms and social taboos.[11] I suggest that, like horror, this humour depends upon responses of disgust and revulsion to the physical bodies – both biological and stylized – of these figures, as well as upon terror of the prospect of domination and violation by these same bodies.[12]

Horror and humour

In modernity, horror and humour are close relatives and have combined into a genre of its own, spawning such films as *Beetlejuice* (1988, dir. Tim Burton) and the *Scary Movie* franchise (five films variously directed by Keenan Ivory Wayans, David Zucker and Malcom D. Lee; 2000–13), and reaching back, as Bruce Hallenbeck argues, to Washington Irving's 'Legend of Sleepy Hollow' (1820).[13] More than a half century ago, Drake Douglas lamented this comedic turn in modern horror, when he wrote that 'The Frankenstein monster, it was reported, died of shame when he became the foil for the comedy antics of Abbott and Costello', and called such material 'appalling attacks on the integrity of horror'.*[14] Things have come a long way since then, and theoretical affinities between these modes of discourse have been sketched well beyond generically hybrid output.

Though they demand very different psychological reactions from their audiences, horror and humour are in many ways 'opposite sides of the same coin', as Robert Bloch has suggested of *Psycho*, his 1959 horror novel that was quickly adapted to the screen by Alfred Hitchcock (1960).*[15] Each depends, at least very often, on fantastical contrivances that invert both material and social norms. And, while there are of course exceptions, I suggest of each mode that these contrivances and inversions serve to highlight normative standards of behaviour along with social constructions of beauty and which bodies are or are not desirable in any given moment and culture. Thus, the presentation of 'abnormal', 'unnatural' and 'deviant' bodies in these genres tap into actual revulsion and disgust, while part of horror's, well, horror stems from the violation or even mutilation of vulnerable bodies deemed conventionally healthy and beautiful. To return to *Psycho*, this combination of vulnerability and conventional beauty is part of what makes the shower scene so iconic.

Moreover, although there cannot be real pain on the comic stage (writ large – and I offer the caveat that I here refer to slapstick physical comedy), the bawdy jokes of comedy and satiric art, and the violence sometimes depicted in its slapstick versions, depend upon real fears of such pain. At one level, internal to texts, the jokes don't work if the victimized characters don't experience and express terror, even if any physical and psychological trauma quickly and unrealistically dissipates, thereby allowing our laughter. At the very least, characters internal to these texts exploit the language of horror for hyperbolic rhetorical effect, as per the Petronius quotes above. External to texts, our audience response to scenarios of violence and domination by undesired and non-normative bodies varies by genre. For example, while audiences may well respond differently to the Princess Leia/Jabba the Hut scene in *Return of the Jedi* (1983, dir. George Lucas) and the 'T-Rex' scene in Trey Parker and Matt Stone's spoof (doubly of the pornography industry and the Church of Latter-Day Saints) *Orgazmo* (1997, dir. Trey Parker) based on generic differences, similar underlying fears and registers of anticipated disgust are at play. And to point towards the sublime, a precondition of experiencing the sublime mixture of fear and pleasure was, for Kant, the privilege of viewing from a position of safety.[16]

Thus, beneath the farce of much Roman sexual humour – and later humour, for that matter – lie preoccupations, perhaps even fear, over masculinity, body image, social status, bodily impenetrability and witchcraft. When this humour provokes disgust as well as fear, I believe we have the recipe for comedic horror. And, as is the way of sex, the body looms large in these dynamics.

Bodily difference that could at once provoke fears and protect against them, while simultaneously evoking both laughter and disgust, can of course be seen in figures such as Priapus and Hermaphroditus. As John R. Clarke argues of depictions of these figures, and of other sexual imagery in Roman material culture, laughter in antiquity could serve an apotropaic function to protect against real and more serious fears and vulnerabilities.[17] The Roman *cinaedus*, who, as Thomas Habinek notes, evolved from the Greek *kinaidos* into something of catchall for a male sexual renegade, offers another figure who represents and evokes fear and disgust, often bodily, in Roman sexual humour.[18] Marilyn Skinner compares the *kinaidos* to a vampire, a life form that may have been imaginary and who threatened to compromise citizenry around them.[19] And, more recently, Evelyn Adkins has referred to the *cinaedus* as a scare figure.[20] And even if these metaphors are, well, metaphorical, I do think there are more serious anxieties behind the laughter.

Comedic figures like the *cinaedus*, its female counterpart *tribas*, and sexually voracious witches permeate Roman sexual humour.[21] They are at once laughable and monstrous in their physical appearance, transgressions and appetites. Whether the poems of Catullus and Martial or the novels of Petronius and Apuleius, this body of literature manifests fear of transgressive gender performance, its failure and its implications for Romanity. And while I think there may be elements of horror to be found in say, Catullus' Attis, who performs auto-castration in a fit of madness (*Cat.* 63), or Martial's Philaenis, a *tribas* whose voracious appetites are marked by bodily difference, I will here focus primarily on select scenes from Petronius and Apuleius, both of whom reach back to earlier traditions of invective and satiric poetry and which mirror one another to an extent in their presentation of undesirable bodies and undesirable sexual situations.[22] Moreover, for reasons of genre, each presents the disgust and fear experienced by characters internal to the text and so present a natural entry point into intersections between the horrific and the humorous.[23] And both of these texts made H. P. Lovecraft's list for finding horror in antiquity. In something of a coda, I will then look to Late Antiquity to argue that we can find a somewhat different dynamic of sexualized horror in Ausonius' *Cupid Crucified*.

Cinaedi as scare figures in Petronius and Apuleius

I begin with *cinaedi*.[24] Petronius' *Satyricon* joins the *cinaedus* and undesirable bodies to what I am inclined to consider comedic horror. The 'Quartilla's Orgy' episode turns what would be terrifying material in other modes into the stuff of laughter. Because of the novel's fragmentary state, the precise circumstances are not entirely clear. But Encolpius and his companions are accused of voyeuristic observation of cult worship of Priapus and are subsequently overpowered and subjected to sexual torture, orchestrated by the religious group's leader, Quartilla. As we have already seen, at the outset of his abuse, Encolpius expresses intense, comedically hyperbolic, emotions of terror, put forth in bodily terms, declaring that 'Indeed, Ascyltos was momentarily struck dumb, while I grew colder than a Gaulish winter and could not say a word' (*Ascyltos quidem paulisper obstupuit*, *ego autem frigidior hieme Gallica factus nullum potui verbum emittere*; 19), and that 'all courage fled us, horrified, and certain death began the cloud the eyes of we poor souls' (19).[25] Encolpius couples this with the expectation that he will 'perish by torture' (*torti perire*; 20). Encolpius and his companions are bound hand and foot (*duas institas ancilla protulit de sinu alteraque pedes nostros alligavit*, *altera manus*, 'a maid pulled out two straps from her pocket; she bound our feet with one, our hands with the other'; 20) and subjected to non-consensual sexual acts at the hands of *cinaedi*. Given that this is the world of humour, this is the stuff of an Adam Sandler comedy (cf. *The Longest Yard* [2005], dir. Peter Segal) not *Deliverance* (1972, dir. John Boorman) or *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994, dir. Frank Darabont), dramatic films that present male homoerotic violence in ways that elicit far different responses from their audiences. But beneath the comedic inversions of a passive Encolpius being violated bodily by an active *cinaedus* and women, especially those of low status, lie serious anxieties. In my reading it is essential that these fears and violent torture are joined to bodily disgust.

Encolpius' narrative emphasizes undesirable characteristics of *cinaedi* that reach back to ps-Aristotle's *Physiognomics* and forward to Giambattista della Porta's *De humana physiognomonia* (1586).[26] As Andreas Serafim, Susanna Asikainen, Walter Penrose and others have recently explored, the author of *Physiognomics* presents *kinaidoi* as having knocked knees, a tilted head, soft body and limp wrists.[27] Drawing on the *Physiognomics* and later ancient sources, Porta's sixteenth century physiognomic portrait of the *cinaedus* presents some of the figure's bodily features as being innate (watery eyes, small hands and feet, a long chin, a weak back) and others as performed affectations (the use of perfume, the wearing of certain types of tunics, a particular gait, artificially curled hair).[28] In Roman literature, many of these traits entered the literary tradition as early as Plautus, seven of whose twenty extant plays invoke *cinaedi*.[29]

This is well-worn territory, but I note that Petronius emphasizes these bodily traits and their undesirability to the point of revulsion. The first *cinaedus* who 'pounds away' (*extortis nos clunibus cecedit*; 21) at Encolpius sports a tell-tale myrtle robe (*myrtea subornatus gausapa*; 21), and, disgusting to Encolpius (and presumably to Petronius' audience) 'smears' his victim 'with hideous smelling kisses' (*basiis olidissimis inquinavit*; 21). The smell suggests an *os impurum* from oral sex and the verb (*inquinavit*) imports the language of both moisture and pollution. Throughout the passages I discuss in this chapter, superlatives have the effect of emphasizing and enhancing responses of disgust and revulsion. Petronius doubles down on moisture as a marker of bodily disgust, as the second effeminate assailant prances in singing a song calling other *cinaedi*, which emphasizes their gate, soft bodies and bodily movements.[30] He then 'defiled me with the smelliest of kisses' (*immundissimo me basio conspuit*; 23) while 'hair tonic streamed over his forehead and down through so much powder between the wrinkles of his cheeks that he looked like a rough wall flaking in a rain shower' (*profluebant per frontem sudantis acaciae rivi et inter rugas malarum tantum erat cretae*, *ut putares detectum perietem nimbo laborare*; 23). The image is at once comedic, gross and terrifying (at least for Encolpius), as his assailant 'long and hard . . . ground his loins over mine', albeit in vain (*frustra*) (*super inguina mea diu multumque frustra moluit*; 23) with Encolpius unable to fight back against the *cinaedus* (*omni vi . . . recusantem;* 23). Change the mode of generic discourse, and the image of a body deemed hideously unattractive, perhaps to the point of monstrosity, overpowering and slobbering on a victim might well evoke horror. Encolpius begins to weep (*non tenui ego diutius lacrimas*, 'I could not withhold tears any longer'; 24); polluted by the wetness of the *cinaedus*, his body also begins to emit moisture.

Apuleius, too, creates a situation of comic cinaedic horror in *The Golden Ass*. Here, the narrator Lucius has been transformed into an ass, a bodily metamorphosis that might itself be considered horrific, as might many in Ovid, as Benjamin Eldon Stevens points out.[31] In 8.24, Lucius-the-ass is purchased at auction by a Gallic priest, whom Lucius identifies as the leader of a *chorus cinaedorum* (8.26) – a chorus of *cinaedi* – though Evelyn Adkins well notes that within the community they address themselves as 'girls' (*puellae*).[32] Though Lucius escapes without suffering the bodily violation Encolpius experiences, he is purchased to be a sexual object for the group, and Lucius likens his position to the sacrifice of Iphigenia, itself a mythological scene of horror (8.26). Lucius' new master declares, putting the prospect of bestiality as well as sexual slavery into the equation (8.26):

> You've come to take my place in the most pitiable pathic position. Long may you live, and long may you serve your masters – and give a break to my long aching, now exhausted loins.

> venisti tandem miserrimi laboris vicarious: sed diu vivas et dominis placeas et meis defectis iam lateribus consulas.

To which Lucius, predictably, expresses fear for what is to come. This disgust and fear of sexual slavery and of bestiality is again amplified through extended meditation on the bodies and bodily performances of the *cinaedi*. Lucius' purchaser is not only a *cinaedus*, but an *old cinaedus*, bald save for some greying curls, who performs dance and music as a priest of Cybele. Lucius emphasizes the importance of the disgust engendered by the figure by beginning his description with an imperative (8.24):

> Know what sort of guy he was. He was a *cinaedus* – an *old cinaedus* indeed bald but with some hair: half-grey, hanging down, and in ringlets, one from the vulgar dregs of people, who, filling the streets and towns with the sounds of cymbals and castanets and carrying around the Syrian goddess, compel her to beg.
>
> scitote qualem: cinaedum et senem cinaedum, calvum quidem sed cincinnis semicanis et pendulis capillatum, unum de triviali popularium faece, qui per plateas et oppida cymbalis et crotalis personantes deamque Syriam circumferentes mendicare compellunt.

The priests self-flagellate, dance in twirls and speak in cracking and effeminate voices. Lucius describes them each as superlatively ugly, covered in clay-coloured cosmetics and eyeshadow, wearing headwraps and saffron clothing (8.27–8):

> On the following day they march out clad in cloaks all sorts of colours, each one got up as ugly as can be, faces covered in clay-coloured cosmetics, eyes kohl-rimmed with a painter's brush, wearing headwraps and saffron robes and linen and diaphanous silk; some wear white tunics covered in purple stripes undulating in every direction in a herringbone pattern, tied high and tight with a belt, with soft, yellow shoes on their feet. The goddess is wrapped in a silken cloak, and they put her on me to carry. They pull back their sleeves and expose their arms up to the shoulder, they raise huge axes and swords in the air, and crying out *Euan, euan!* they leap about like Cybele's worshippers, the tune on the flute goading them on, dancing their ecstatic and orgiastic dance . . . they attack their own flesh with bites.[33] Finally, they each of them slash their arms to ribbons with the double-edged blades that they carried. Finally, he snatches up the whip, the distinctive device displayed by those half-men – twisted ropes of woollen fleece teased into a rich fringe of strands and studded with knucklebones, all shapes and sizes, of sheep – and with it he flagellates himself, each lash having many knots, though he has girded himself against the pain of the rain of the blows with a rigidity that surpasses belief. You would have seen the ground grow damp from the execrable and unpalatable effeminate blood, from the slicing of the swords and the wounds of the whips.

> die sequenti variis coloribus indusiati et deformiter quisque formati, facie caenoso pigmento delita et oculis obunctis graphice prodeunt, mitellis et crocotis et carbasinis et bombycinis iniecti, quidam tunicas albas in modum lanicolarum quoquoversum fluente purpura depictas cingulo subligati pedes luteis induti calceis; deamque serico contectam amiculo mihi gerendam imponunt brachiisque suis humero tenus renudatis, attolentes immanes gladios ac secures, evantes exsiliunt incitante tibiae cantu lymphaticum tripudium … morsibus suos incursantes musculos, ad postremum ancipiti ferro quod gerebant sua quisque brachia dissicant … arrepto denique flagro, quod semiviris illis proprium gestamen est, contortis taenis lanosi velleris prolixe fimbriatum et multiiugis talis ovium tesseratum, indidem sese multinodis commulcat ictibus, mire contra plagarum dolores praesumptione munitus. cerneres prosectu gladiorum ictuque flagrorum solum spurcitia sanguinis effeminati madescere.

Here again Roman sexual humour draws upon common physiognomy and performance of deviant masculinity to render the threat of sexual violence more demeaning, more disgusting, and, ultimately, more horrific – and I think it is important that Lucius draws upon the language of deformity and metamorphosis – the *cinaedi* appear *deformiter*.[34] Lucius reports the *cinaedi* bring in a local boy as a guest to dinner (*comitem cenae secum adducunt*; 8.29), after which they – superlatively uncontrollable in their urges – forcibly strip the boy and 'surged upon him in waves from every direction, demanding his services with their unspeakable mouths' (*passimque circumfuse nudatum supantumque iuvenem execrandis oribus flaigabant*; 8.29). To me, this reads as a comedic precursor to scenes of zombies feeding on the flesh of a new kill, especially since the scene is introduced with the metaphor of insatiable diners at a banquet.

Women as scare figures in Petronius and Apuleius

Petronius and Apuleius also intersect in their depictions of sexual violence done by witches, and both texts reach back to more traditionally horrific figures such as Medea and Erichtho. Returning to the *Satyricon*, Encolpius once again has his body violated in degrading and painful ways, and, again, this torture done to Encolpius is perpetrated by undesirable bodies, this time by elderly women.[35] As with much of the *Satyricon* the scenes are disjointed by lacunae. But it seems that, after berating Encolpius in terms suggestive of horror ('What ill-omened night bird has devoured your sinews? What filth, what cadaver did you tread on at night at the crossroads?', *quae striges comederunt nervos tuos, aut quod purgamentum* [*in*] *nocte calcasti in trivio aut cadaver*?; 134), an old woman named Proselenos beats Encolpius with a switch, such that Encolpius fears serious injury. After which, the woman 'sits down and complains of long, lingering old age' (*aetatisque longae moram tremulis vocibus coepit accusare*; 134), emphasizing Encolpius' previous unflattering description of her appearance as an 'old woman, dressed in an ugly black garment, her hair in mayhem' (*anus lacertis crinibus nigraque veste deformis*; 133, and I note the use of *deformis*).

Next an old priestess Oenothea promises to cure Encolpius' impotence. Following an extended scene that emulates Medea's sorcery in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, an episode itself bordering on horror, Encolpius expresses his terror (*inhorreo*), 'look[s] at the old woman more closely' (directing our own gaze to the body while again emphasizing its age), and is compelled to go to bed with the woman, who kisses him again and again (135):[36]

> I shuddered, terrified by a promise so fabulous. I began to look at the old woman more closely . . . 'Therefore,' Oenothea declared, 'obey my command.' . . . She carefully wiped her hands, lowered herself onto the bed, and kissed me one time after another.
>
> inhorrui ego tam fabulosa pollicitatione conteritus, anumque inspicere diligentius coepi . . . 'ergo' exclamat Oenothea 'imperio parete' . . . detersisque curiose manibus inclinavit se in lectulum ac me semel iterumque basiavit.

The priestess, described as a 'an extremely cruel old lady' (*crudelissima anus*) coats a leather phallus (*scorteum fascinum*) with oil (*oleo*), ground pepper (*minute pipere*) and crushed nettle seeds (*urticae trito*) and inserts it into Encolpius' anus (138; albeit likely a result of a lacuna, the resultant polyptoton of *ano* ['anus'] and *anus* ['old woman'] is rich). She then beats Encolpius' crotch with a switch of nettles (138):

> She mixed nasturtium seed with artemisia and spread it over my genitals, then, with a switch of green nettles in her limber hand, beat everything beneath my navel . . .
>
> nasturcii sucum cum habrotono miscet perfusisque inguinibus meis viridis urticae fascem comprehendit omnia infra umbilicum coepit lenta manu caedere . . .

This has surely caused many readers to grimace and squirm and, were this not the world of comedy, would be downright hard to read or watch. The imagined pain of the enhanced phallus is reminiscent of Catullus 15, in which Catullus threatens the anal penetration of a rival with a radish and mullet, the latter of which at least threatens serious internal damage, as Shawn O'Bryhim has noted.[37] However, in Catullus, we have an aggressive threat; in Petronius we have enacted torture – engendering disgust – and this terrifying bodily violation is amplified by the emphasis upon disgust in the bodies of those who perpetrate the violence. Encolpius repeatedly refers to the women as *anus*, which underscores his fixation on their age. The inversions of the elderly physically dominating a person in their prime, and especially of a man being penetrated by a woman are the stuff of comedy. But the perceived physical ugliness of the women's bodies adds additional insult to Encolpius' humiliation. For me at least, a simple change in the tone and mode of storytelling would turn this episode into a scene akin to contemporary torture horror. And, powerless to resist the elderly sorceress Oenothea, despite what she subjects him to, Encolpius is, perhaps, bewitched. Agism and patriarchy intersect to create this grotesque, comedic horror, joined as it is to male fears of women and of aged bodies deemed sexually unappealing.

In Apuleius, the witches Meroe and Pamphile are more traditionally the stuff of horror, and each episode ties these figures with Erichtho and traditions of witchcraft by drawing on Thessaly as a setting.[38] While Meroe's age is emphasized (*anus* again), her body itself is not a source of horror (*anum sed admodum scitulam*; 1.7), though the bodies of her victims very much are. She savagely punishes unfaithful lovers, turning one into a beaver in order that it might bite off its own testicles (more auto-phagism), while sealing up the wound of a rival so that she might remain pregnant in perpetuity (1.9).[39] As is well attested, her witchcraft is the stuff of a Medea, and her murder of Socrates is grotesque in its supernatural violence.[40] And, when Meroe spares the life of Aristomenes, she and her also elderly companion, Panthia, grotesquely outrage his body, holding him down, sitting on his face, and urinating on him (*remoto grabatulo varicus super faciem meam residentes vesicam exonerant*, *quoad me urinae spurcissimae madore perluerent*, 'with the bed removed, they straddle me, they sit on my face, they empty both of their bladders, just to soak me in the slime of their putrid piss'; 1.13). Aristomenes emphasizes his disgust, and, in addition to the polluting and magical powers of urine which reach back to Hesiod's *Works and Days*, the elderly women make Aristomenes wet in a way that diminishes his masculinity.[41]

Pamphile represents another monstrous woman, whose somatic Ovidian transformation into an owl is both terrifying and a source of fascination for Lucius (3.21). And Pamphile, too, uses her powers to control and possess sexually men who were otherwise unavailable to her, while emulating Medea and Erichtho in the language and tone of her sorcery (2.5; cf. 1.8). She 'invades the soul, and binds with the eternal fetters of deep love' (*invadit spiritum, amoris profundi pedicis aeternis alligat*; 2.5) and turns humans into animals or worse (2.5). The metaphor of 'fetters' or 'shackles' (*pedicis*) is traditional of erotic imagery, but it simultaneously conjures slavery and torture.

In all of these witches, we might read what Barbara Creed, drawing on Julia Kristeva, understands as a trope in modern horror that reaches back to figures like Medusa in ancient myth: the monstrous-female is abject in that, once sexually spurned, she transgresses boundaries and threatens castration (Freud is ever-present in horror scholarship).[42] In addition to the beaver anecdote, Panthia explicitly suggests castrating Aristomenes (1.13). But opposed to the genuine horror embodied by figures like Seneca's Medea and Lucan's Erichtho, I read each as, ultimately, operating on a comedic register, with more traditionally horrific witchcraft redirected or misdirected towards sexual exploits and failures.

Cupid crucified

Finally, I want to turn to a somewhat different scene that evokes horror in a playfully comedic text with erotic themes: Ausonius' *Cupid Crucified* (*Cupido cruciator*). The eclogue, as Ausonius frames it (*huic eclogae*; Praef.), opens with a litany of mythological women, who had either died or undergone Ovidian metamorphosis as a product of love gone wrong, and each is depicted as if a ghost, 'bearing the signs of her death' (*leti* *argumenta gerebant*; 4), haunting the large dark forest (*errantes silva in magna et sub luce maligna*, 'wandering in a large forest and beneath a spiteful light'; 5) in the aerial fields (*aeris in campus*; 1) noted by Virgil at *Aen*. 6.887. *Silva*, of course, does double duty as a centuries-old metaphor for the literary tradition.[43] When they catch sight of Amor ('Love'), they collectively blame him for their miserable fates, and 'all make to ready the tokens of their own death' (*cunctae exprobantes tolerate insignia leti, expedient*; 65–6) to use as weapons against Amor.

I jump to Myrrha, whose own story and transformation in Ovid (*Met*. 10.298–502) might be read as horror. In Ovid's version of the myth, Myrrha is an unfortunate woman, whose tale Orpheus as internal narrator warns is an ominous one (*dira canam*; *Met.* 10.300). Following an incestuous sexual relationship with her father, Cinyras, Myrra flees, gives birth to the also ill-fated Adonis (a mortal lover of Aphrodite, who died in a hunting accident), and is transformed into a myrrh tree as an act of mercy from the gods. In Ausonius, 'With glistening tears', Myrrha 'cuts open her mature womb and thrusts the amber gems of her weeping trunk at the trembling boy' (*rescindit adultum / Myrrha uterum lacrimis lucentibus inque paventem / gemmea fletiferi iaculatur sucina trunci*; 72–4).[44] The imagery of a mother, impregnated by incest, ripping open her own womb to use her progeny as a weapon is revolting and terrifying, and *paventem* makes clear that Amor is indeed scared. As well he should be. Myrrha serves as set-up for the maternal violence to come: as the passage continues, Amor's own mother sides with the 'great uprising' (*tantos . . . tumultus*; 80) and 'redoubles' his 'terror' (*terrorem ingeminat*; 82). Venus charges Amor not only with her own shame resultant from her affair with Mars, but also with responsibility for the laughable bodily forms of familiar figures from sexual humour and apotropaic symbolism (80, 84–7). It is Amor's crime (*crimina*) that Priapus' (a deity marked by his giant erect phallus) body is ridiculed for his *pube pudenda* (85) and that Hermaphroditus (son of Aphrodite and Hermes, who was punished by being turned into a hermaphrodite) is *semivir* (87). But words are not enough (*nec satis in verbis*; 88): in a brief scene evocative of Euripides' *Bacchae* (in which Agave, driven mad by Dionysus, tears her son Pentheus limb from limb and parades his corpse as a hunting trophy), Venus 'beats her son, who wept and feared harsher things' (*maerentem pulsat puerum et graviora paventem*; 89). N. Gregson Davis finds Venus' violent punishment 'extreme' and frames the poem as a *katabasis*.[45] Ausonius then emphasizes that Amor's body is thrashed (*mulcato corpore*; 90).

As is the way of comedic discourse, Amor's pain, rent body, and fear all dissipate (93–6). The women forgive the boy, roses grow from his wounds and the body heals (90–2), and Venus renews her love for her son (97–8). Horror gives way to pastoral charm. Yet, some vestige of disgust and fear remain to haunt Amor's dreams: 'With their nocturnal shapes, such visions sometimes cultivate frightened sleep with their hollow fear' (*talia nocturnis olim simulacra figuris / exercent trepidam casso terrore quietam*; 99–100). We might, therefore connect Ausonius' *Cupid Crucified* with Apuleius' Cupid and Psyche narrative in *The Golden Ass*, in which Venus, also believing her reputation threatened, punishes Psyche, only to soften and perform as the featured dancer at the wedding that made Psyche her daughter in law.

Conclusion

Parvulescu finds 'Laughter a space where fascination and horror might come together'.[46] While Parvulescu is focused on horror as a concept of the long twentieth century, to me, this line maps well onto the fearful laughter for which I hope I have at least begun to sketch. These acts committed by bodies deemed to be deformed and disgusting, or that violate and deform bodies previously deemed beautiful, is the stuff of horror as a mode, even when presented within the topsy-turvy world of comedy and humour. Our generic understanding and comfortability with the comedic mode may allow us – as Thomas Hobbes suggests – to make 'those grimaces called laughter':*[47]

> *Sudden Glory* is the passion which maketh those *Grimaces* called LAUGHTER; and is caused either by some sudden act of their own, that pleaseth them; or by the apprehension of some deformed thing in another, by comparison whereof they suddenly applaud themselves.

But that does not make our actual revulsion and more deeply seeded anxieties any less real than the mode of horror would evoke, and, internal to the texts, these scenes hinge upon the terror of those figures in danger. The figures of Priapus and Hermaphroditus fascinated the Romans, and, even as *cinaedi* and witches appear as scare figures, they are also, perhaps, emancipatory figures who offer simultaneously transgressive and liberating possibilities: of breaking norms of gender performance, immoderation, indulging any sexual desires even if deemed socially deviant, and, reaching back to the *cinaedus*' origins in dance, shaking your butt however you want. Judging by their persistence in ancient humour, I think the Romans imagined these figures and fantastic encounters with them at once funny, terrifying, revolting and alluring, such that audiences couldn't take their eyes away.

Notes

1. Cf. Carroll 1987: 52–4; 1999: 149–50. On horror and Graeco-Roman antiquity, see, for example, Felton 2010, 2021.
2. Trans. mine.
3. On the role of fear in Petronius' Quartilla episode, see Conte 1996: 11. Translations of Petronius are adapted from Ruden 2000.
4. Parvulescu 2010: 21. Parvulescu proceeds to argue that horror, joy, humour and the body come together in modern literature and art (93, 126–7).
5. Parvulescu 2010: 22.
6. Crane 1994: 37.
7. Badley 1995: 11.
8. Finkelpearl 2012: xxvii–xxviii suggests that a number of episodes in Apuleius provide entertainment while simultaneously having been 'designed to mark the world as increasingly

dark and out of control'.* *Metamorphoses* is an alternate title for the *Golden Ass*. Translations of Apuleius are adapted from Relihan 2007.

9. Beard 2014: 172–8 on 'death by laughter', and 178–84 on Apuleius. Gardner 2015: 398 notes that 'Aristomenes' fear yields to uncontrollable laughter'.* On the oscillating tension between joy/entertainment and fear/pain in Petronius, see Rimell 2002: 176–7.
10. Thumiger 2017: 368. Thumiger also notes the ancient idea that 'certain forms of derangement . . . might produce pleasureable entertainment of a deviant kind' (368).*
11. See Clarke 2007: 165–6.
12. On disgust in antiquity, see especially the essays in Lateiner and Spatharas 2016. Lateiner 2016 speaks to my points below on Petronius and Apuleius.
13. Hallenbeck 2009: 3.
14. Douglas 1966: 8.
15. Carroll 1999: 145–6. Quote is from Bloch 1985: 22.
16. On safety and the Kantian sublime, see *Critique of Judgment* para. 28 (I use Kant 1987: 120–2). For recent studies, see, for example, Weiner and Benz 2018, Fernández 2020: 25. Cf. Lucr. *DRN* 2.1–6.
17. Clarke 2005. Against Clarke, see Beard 2014: 234 n. 25.
18. Habinek 2005: 177–98, as well as Young 2015 and Weiner 2023. On the *kinaidos*/*cinaedus* generally, see Richlin 1993, Taylor 1997, Williams 2010, Sapsford 2022, and the essays in Gazzarri and Weiner 2023a.
19. Skinner 2014: 154–5. Cf. Gerö 2014: 20.
20. Adkins 2022: 34–5, Williams 2010: 140. See also Holmes 2012: 94–7, 102–4.
21. As Boehringer 2015: 383–4 points out, *tribas*, like the male *cinaedus*, is difficult to translate, 'on account of the few occurrences that have come down to us'.* The word suggests 'a form of sexual' practice and gender non-conformity by assuming traditionally masculine characteristics, whether by penetrating boys, having sex with other women, physical traits such as baldness, or even by athletic participation and enthusiasm.
22. On Philaenis as a *tribas* in Martial, see Boehringer 2015.
23. As novels, these works depict actions and experiences (even if fictionalized), whereas satiric poetry makes frequent use of lewd accusations and threats, without necessarily dwelling on personae experiencing the acts in the moment.
24. Given the 'constellation of characteristics'(Kamen and Levin-Richardson 2015: 453) intersecting in the *cinaedus*, I here leave the term untranslated, following the precedent of Kamen and Levin-Richardson 2015 and the essays in Gazzarri and Weiner 2023a. On the semantic range of *cinaedus*, see Williams 2015. On the *cinaedus*' origins in music and dance, see Habinek 2005, Tsitsiridis 2015, Sapsford 2022. Connors 1992: 30–3 associates Petronius' use of Sotadean meter with *cinaedi*.
25. I adapt Ruden's 2000 translation of Petronius.
26. See, for example, Borris 2004: 184–91 and Gazzarri and Weiner 2023b.
27. Asikainen 2018: 34, Serafim 2016, Penrose 2020: 35–6, Gazzarri and Weiner 2023b.
28. On the *cinaedus*' dress and hair, see Olson 2014 and Gazzarri 2019.
29. On *cinaedi* in Plautus, see Weiner 2023 with bibliography.
30. See, for example, Carson 1990 on moisture and femininity/unmanliness.
31. See Stevens 2023.

32. Adkins 2022: 43–4, drawing on 8.26. See also Blood 2019.
33. The auto-phagism recalls the myth of Erysichthon, found in Callimachus (*Hymn to Demeter*) and Ovid (*Met.* 8.741–878).
34. On the various usages of *form* in Apuleius with focus on this episode, see Stevens 2023.
35. Cf. Horace's treatment of Medea (though she is not elderly) in *Epodes* 3.
36. A similar dynamic infuses the recent horror film *X* (2022, dir. Ti West).
37. O'Bryhim 2017.
38. Thessaly is, of course, the setting of Lucan's Erichtho episode (*BC* 6.507–830). In her Apuleius reader, Finkelpearl 2012: 40 notes the region's significance as a place famous for witchcraft. Cf. Lucan, *BC* 6.435–506. Gardener 2015: 397 notes the influence of Petronius upon 'Apuleius' female monstrosities'.*
39. There is perhaps an added significance to the choice of a beaver for animal transformation. Castoreum, a substance secreted from the anal glands of beavers, was highly valued in antiquity for its usage in both pharmacology and perfumery. So the beaver may be emblematic of both the healing powers attributed to witches and the power of seduction. Burdock 2007: 51 notes that 'trappers have long used castoreum lures to attract beavers'.* This may account for Apuleius' imagery of beavers being attracted to themselves.
40. Cf. Gardner 2015: 397: 'Meroe, who is lined explicitly with Euripides' stage heroine Medea (1.10)'.* On Apuleius' tragic filiations, see further Harrison 2013: 146–7.
41. May 2013: 160 notes that Petronius, too, gives urine the magical effect of preventing movement, and that it is also attested as a punishment for adulterers. Winkler's 1985: 83 summary of this scene in Apuleius captures its intersections with horror.
42. Creed 1996. Cf. Crane 1994 and Gardner 2015. On psychoanalysis, ancient Mediterranean myth, and feminist thought, see the essays in Zajko and Leonard 2008.
43. Cf. Petrain 2000 and De Bruyn 2001. On Ausonius' engagement with Statius through *sylvae*, see McGill 2014: 135.
44. Cf. Green 1991: 532 on *gemmea sucina* as amber.
45. Davis 1994: 162. See also Pucci 2009: 66 and Yaceczko 2021 on Virgilian intertexts in the poem.
46. Parvulescu 2010: 64.
47. Hobbes 1991: 43. See also Heyd 1982, Ewin 2001.

CHAPTER 7

CRUOR IN FLORES MUTABITUR: HORRIFIC HYBRIDIZATIONS IN THE *METAMORPHOSES* OF OVID

Aline Estèves

Ovid's *Metamorphoses*: An expressly paradoxical work

In the relatively homogeneous landscape formed by Latin epics of the classical period, whether they focus on legendary battles or historical conflicts,[1] the generic singularity of the *Metamorphoses* is obvious.[2] This is the sole work by Ovid that can be assimilated to the form of the epic genre – a vast poem of fifteen books composed exclusively in hexameters, two distinctive features of the epic since Aristotle.[3] Moreover, beginning already in the prologue, Ovid underlines his epic pretensions,[4] and in the epilogue associates to this generic identity the eternity of his fame as a poet; the formulation clearly places him within an epic tradition going back to Ennius.[5] At the same time, the Augustan poet practices many departures from the epic genre; this iconoclastic approach is also asserted in the first four verses of the work. This paradox, resting on generic hybridization, neatly signals the auctorial identity of the Augustan poet.

The subject of the work, without being exclusively Greek,[6] thus mobilizes a rare erudition of metamorphosis myths regularly pertaining to an erotic issue,[7] whereas most Latin authors of epics, from Ennius to Virgil, selected warlike subjects likely to interest the Roman elite on historical and symbolic levels.[8] Furthermore, the kaleidoscopic composition of the *Metamorphoses* confers a certain opacity on the axiological purpose of this epic.[9] Indeed, Naevius, Ennius and Virgil, in accord with the precepts of Aristotle,[10] choose a perfectly demarcated subject allowing them to build an axiological discourse oriented towards the glory of Rome. By contrast, the multiplicity of legends that make up the *Metamorphoses* do fragment its *dispositio*:[11] the legends told are not ordered according to a continuous demonstrative chronology starting from the chaotic origin of the world and concluding in the glory of its time.[12] If the artifice that consists of having several legends told by a single narrator internal to the narrative is regularly mobilized,[13] the process does not allow for articulation, in a homogeneous discursive direction, of the mosaic of narratives that make up the poem. Finally, there are equally substantial problems relating to the *elocutio*: according to some critics, epic *grauitas* can characterize some parts of the poem, but other forms of poetry – such as didactic, lyric and tragic poetry – would interfere with and colour a large number of myths with their own stylistic features.[14]

By creating a link between Virgil's *Aeneid* and Lucan's *Pharsalia*, the *Metamorphoses* retains a defining place in the literary diachrony of the Latin epic genre. The *Aeneid* tells the legendary past of the *Vrbs*, from the exile of Aeneas to his arrival in Latium, where the struggle against the partisans of the Trojan hero Turnus is an irrefutable allusion to the civil wars that darkened the end of the Republic.[15] The *Pharsalia* relates to the historical past of Rome, focusing on the civil war between Caesar and Pompey, and not without symbolically linking this tragic period of Roman history to the legendary murder of Remus by Romulus and erecting the myth of Medusa as a symbol.[16] Ovid's *Metamorphoses* are also part of this double historical-legendary foundation, which has hermeneutical value: the mythological transformations recounted in the main part of the poem lead, in the final Book, to a metamorphosis closer to historical time;[17] indeed, the transformation of Julius Caesar into a comet leads to the glorification of Augustus.[18]

Moreover, the *Aeneid* and *Pharsalia* contain key episodes that see the heroes facing forms of metamorphosis.[19] For example, in the *Aeneid*, we can read the transformation of Polydore into a tree with bleeding branches, and the transformation of Aeneas' ships into nymphs; in the *Pharsalia*, there are dead bodies resurrected by Erichtho or the Roman soldiers led by Cato, whose bodies underwent monstrous mutations as a result of bites inflicted by Libyan snakes. In the *Metamorphoses,* the theme of the transformation of bodies is no longer episodic but constitutes the heart of the work; with infinite variations, this theme allows the poet to give free rein to his *ars*, which for Ovid is perhaps the essential interest in the subject he has chosen.

But even if he refocuses his epic on corporeal themes, the Augustan poet does not marry so many of the topics of the genre in the field of horror. Indeed, horror, as I have demonstrated elsewhere, usually nuances the eulogistic discourse of the epic, disrupting the genre's aesthetic topic of physical violence and rendering problematic the *delectatio* and *utilitas*, which any epic narrative centred on warlike events is supposed to foster.[20] Imaginary horror thus endows the Roman epic with three major meanings that are abundantly exploited and systematically linked to the representation of the body. It can be a physiological trait characterizing a being, or an object that takes the form of a bristling or shivering of the body to constitute an intrinsic characteristic (ears of wheat and the coat of the wild boar, bristling by nature), or a contingent but lasting property (irrepressible shivers and tremors in response to the wind or under the shock of horrifying fear).[21] It is also an emotion of heightened fear, which can be experienced *ad uenerationem* or *ad odium*,[22] and which is accompanied by persistent physiological disturbances such as tremors, hair standing on end, or an inability to speak.[23] Finally, it is an extraordinary phenomenon, most often characterized by violence, particularly physical, and the only phenomenon capable of arousing this type of heightened fear.[24]

The violent antagonisms that animate the plot of the *Bellum Punicum* of Naevius, the *Annales* of Ennius and the *Aeneid* of Virgil, predecessors of Ovid in the field of Latin epic writing, perhaps offer a large space for the exploitation of horror under these two last meanings. This is less evident in the *Metamorphoses*, which develops in a leisurely fashion legends where love, along with animal and plant transformations, occupies more space than warlike confrontations. As we will see, in fact, despite the deep anchoring of the Ovidian narrative in the main themes, horror in the *Metamorphoses* is reserved for an incident and a role that is *a priori* inessential.[25] Better put, Ovid greatly modifies the treatment and meaning of horror. These modifications are part of the authorial singularity of the poet: they metamorphose the topical treatment of physical horror in the epic in the sense of a hybrid *nouitas*, simultaneously grotesque and delicate, the meaning and scope of which are up to us to evaluate.

'Naturalistic' horror in the *Metamorphoses*: Conventional *imagines*

The first notable fact: Ovid sets out to select and drastically reduce the traditional horrific themes offered by the topics of epics. Although the expression of *horror* felt in reaction to certain acts of war concerns a significant number of lexical items in Ennius and Virgil,[26] this use is virtually eradicated from the *Metamorphoses*: only the first Book contains a relatively abstract mention of the *horrida arma* of the Bronze Age,[27] perhaps because Ovid does not wish to develop in *aemulatio* the horrible theme of war already dealt with by Lucretius in Book 5 of *De Rerum Natura* and sporadically illustrated by Virgil in Books 8–12 of the *Aeneid*.[28] Similarly, Ovid offers only relatively little room for the expression of horror as an emotion and the evocation of its physiological repercussions, signalling it in a rather conventional way, in the form of a quick allusion to the tremors, paralysis, pallor and dumbfoundedness that accompany it.[29] To the contrary, he preferentially exploits themes of 'naturalistic' horror – that is to say, that related to the representation of elements, plants, animals and hybrid beings – in the occurrence of plant and animal metamorphoses; among the forty or so metamorphoses,[30] twenty-eight occurrences of the *horrere* lexicon (about three-quarters) concern this type of use.

Nevertheless, within this field the poet hardly shows an *ingenium* original enough to distinguish his aesthetic productions from the achievements of his predecessors. The themes he links to the explicit expression of 'naturalistic' horror seem stale: in the *Metamorphoses*, as in previous epics, one finds an image of water whose surface shudders with waves;[31] trees with spiky branches, and sharp trembling plants;[32] animals with bristles, feathers, or scales (boar, pig, dove, snake, horse, bear);[33] and monstrous beings whose skin or limbs bristle (Polyphemus, Medusa, the dragon that confronts the Argonauts, Boreas and Winter).[34] None of these occurrences gives rise to a development deep enough for the author's *ars* to draw attention to a unique aesthetic detail: the colours and plastic properties attributed to these objects and creatures are perfectly conventional, as evidenced by the clouds and torrential rains linked to Boreas,[35] the black colour associated with hairy or horrible animals such as bears and snakes,[36] and the rocks and branches that litter the landscape of a horrifying place.[37]

Certainly, Ovid sometimes plays with the theme of 'naturalistic' horror by working on several meanings of the *horrere* lexicon, moving from the connotative to the denotative: the horrible Cyclops, capable of making the horrifying Etna and the horrible forests tremble, praises the beauty of the fur that covers his body with a ruffled fleece, in order to better seduce Galatea;[38] and in fright, Cyparissus' hair turns into bristling foliage at the end of his metamorphosis into a cypress.[39] By a simple syllepsis between horror in the emotional sense and horror in the physical sense, Ovid thus illustrates the metamorphosis suggested by the intersection of the meanings of the lexicon of *horrere*. His predecessors were able to play on this metaphorical property of the lexicon, while leaving it to the reader to decipher the emotional or physiological connotations of the use of this or that term according to context.[40] Ovid openly exploits the connotative properties of the lexicon to make the semantic metaphor a site of physical metamorphosis.[41] He thus introduces 'horrifying' motifs that signal his ability to manipulate language and generic conventions but reveal, above all, his sense of offbeat humour: the ridicule of the Cyclops in the *Metamorphoses,* for example, completely contravenes, in terms of both *decorum* and reception, the conventions of epic, whose literary identity and excellence are usually based on the demands of *grauitas* and the *sublime* in an aesthetic and ethical sense.

In short, not content with making sporadic use of the *horror* lexicon, Ovid's treatment of 'naturalistic' horror themes remains conventional enough to ensure that the *horroris imagines* he scatters through his work are not distinguished by their *nouitas*. The exception to this comes from a few scenes that paradoxically aim to elicit an amused smile from the reader These manifestations of *ars* based on semantic games and dominated by facetious intent are rare, but they reveal an essential facet of Ovid's treatment of horror, however sporadic it may be: the poet endows the epic themes of horror with unexpected *colores* in order to catch the reader off guard. This taste for disparity invites us to question Ovid's treatment of the *horroris imagines* that are regularly the subject of a more polemical approach than the 'naturalistic' horrors, that is, those involving physical violence committed during martial confrontations.

Physical violence in the *Metamorphoses*: Monsters of the flesh and 'blood flowers'

The Latin epic poets have two essential procedures for denouncing acts of violence that betray an excessive overflow of aggression to the point of horror: they use the lexicon of *horror* to explicitly denounce the outrageous violence of certain confrontations,[42] or they develop a violent aesthetic that contravenes epic conventions by making descriptions in *euidentia*,[43] and by sprinkling their text with macabre details, notably by means of *uerba sordida* theoretically excluded from the genre.[44] As already noted, Ovid makes little use of the *horror* lexicon for explicitly denouncing acts of war. But he sometimes introduces some thematic renewal into the field of horrific violence; in addition, he can develop scenes of aggression in *euidentia*. Yet even if acts of horrific violence remain rare in the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid imposes a singular treatment on them in order to distinguish himself, once again, from his predecessors.

Putting an eye out, crucifixion, disembowelment: Horrific new attacks linked to the violence of war

Only a few violent scenes in the *Metamorphoses* are strictly speaking epic in nature. These are those that animate the two major warrior *epyllia* of the work:[45] Perseus' fight against the followers of Phineus, who is vying for Andromeda's hand (Book 5), and the struggle between the Lapiths and the Centaurs (Book 12). Both episodes give Ovid the opportunity to develop warlike confrontations, typical epic scenes, although the poet lends certain aggressive gestures such a singular tone that he frees himself from the topics of the genre to verge on parody.[46] Indeed, many of the mutilations described by Ovid constitute a new type of injury, one earlier Latin epic texts do not mention. In Book 5, for example, the poet mentions the case of Pelates, who is nailed to a door by two throwing weapons that leave him hanging;[47] in Book 12, the centaur Amycus smashes the face of the Lapith Celadon, whose eyes shoot out of their sockets;[48] the Lapith Exadius smashes the head of the centaur Gryneus, whose eyes also pop out of their sockets and get tangled in his beard;[49] the centaur Dorylas, with his hand nailed to his forehead, reels out his entrails by entangling his hooves in them.[50]

Not content with showing an obvious predilection for disfigurement, or for enucleation and crucifixion – two themes that do not appear in epic before Ovid, but that Lucan will take up again – the poet develops each of these vignettes with *euidentia:* he places particular emphasis on macabre motifs and gives them a visual presence through animation effects or sensual details that mention the colour and tactile quality of the organs spread outside the injured bodies. Even if these episodes are rare and quite circumstantial in terms of the number of verses in the *Metamorphoses*, the fact remains that Ovid demonstrates novelty in his *aristeia* narratives by introducing new forms of macabre horror, tending towards grotesque evocations because of the incongruous details, based particularly on the introduction of *uerba humilia*, the hybrid association of words belonging to different registers of language, or the production of an image by metonymy or comparison, whose connection proves unbalanced or out of place in terms of epic *decorum*.[51]

Rape, incest, tyrannicide: New forms of horrific physical violence

If we note the occurrences of the *horrere* lexicon explicitly denouncing acts of aggression in the *Metamorphoses*, their rarity is surprising, as is the singularity of their use. In the *Metamorphoses,* in fact, very few terms in the lexicon of *horrere* qualify as warlike horror, contradicting the topical expectations of the epic genre. Similarly, the *uerba sordida* frequently used in the *Aeneid* to denounce the excessive and scandalous nature of certain warlike acts, such as *cruor*, *tabum*, *sanies*, *truncare* and *truncus* or even *cerebrum*, are also little used by Ovid.[52]

In contrast, a few singular occurrences of the *horrere* lexicon in the *Metamorphoses* serve to denounce types of physical aggression that are rarely denounced this way in the traditional epic. Thus the death of Hyacinth gives rise to a comparison in which the character is likened to a lily whose bristling stamens are broken;[53] Thisbe, at the sight of the body of Pyramus, who committed suicide believing her to have been devoured by wild beasts, trembles with horror like sea water rippled by the breeze;[54] the incestuous desire of Myrrha, who manages to slip into her father's bed at night by trickery, evokes the *horror* of the unfortunate heroine and her nurse;[55] Philomela, raped by Tereus, is seized with horror during the act itself, but also at the sight of the palace of her torturer, which her sister Procne takes her back to;[56] finally, the world would have trembled with horror at Caesar’s murder, just as the gods trembled with horror at Lycaon’s crime.[57]

Among these incidents, the horror of Hyacinthus’ death can be considered apart. With this image, Ovid clearly aims to propose a *uariatio* of the theme introduced by Virgil in the *Aeneid*, where the collapse in death of the body of Euryalus, a young man characterized, like Hyacinthus, by his beauty and youth, is likened to the movement of a poppy bending under the weight of the rain. The text in bold common to both works shows their relationship:

> Thus was he pleading; but the sword, driven with force, passes through the ribs and rends the snowy breast. Euryalus rolls over in death; over his lovely limbs runs the blood, and his drooping neck sinks on his shoulder, as when a purple flower, severed by the plough, droops in death; or as poppies, with weary neck, bow the head, when weighted by a chance shower.[58]
>
> *Verg.* Aen. *9.431–7, Euryalus’ death*

Talia dicta dabat, sed uiribus ensis adactus
transabiit costas et candida pectora rumpit.
Voluitur Euryalus leto, pulchrosque per artus
it cruor **inque umeros ceruix** conlapsa **recumbit**:
purpureus ueluti cum flos succisus aratro
languescit **moriens**, lassoue **papauera** collo
demisere caput pluuia cum forte grauantur.

> But his arts are of no avail; the wound is past all cure. Just as when in a watered garden, if someone breaks off violets or poppies or lilies, bristling with their yellow stamens, fainting they suddenly droop their withered heads and can no longer stand erect, but gaze, with tops bowed low, upon the earth: so the dying face lies prone, the neck, its strength all gone, cannot sustain its own weight and falls back upon the shoulders.[59]
>
> *Ov.* Met. *10.189–95, Hyacinthus’ death*

Nil prosunt artes: erat inmedicabile uulnus.
Vt, siquis uiolas rigidumue **papauer** in horto
iliaque infringat fuluis horrentia linguis,
marcida demittant subito caput illa uietum
nec se sustineant spectentque cacumine terram:
sic uultus **moriens** iacet et defecta uigore
ipsa sibi est oneri **ceruix umeroque recumbit**.

The two episodes, however, involve very different circumstances: Euryalus dies in war, having committed a night-time massacre that is in many ways reprehensible, while

Hyacinthus dies by accident, his head smashed by a discus thrown by Phoebus, who is in love with the young mortal. The motif of blood dominates the death of Euryalus, while that of collapse is emphasized in the death of Hyacinthus, and the colour red permeates the Virgilian vignette, while Ovid highlights the delicate sulphur whiteness of the lilies. Ovid thus erases any trace of macabre horror in Hyacinthus' death in order to emphasize motifs of beauty, grace, nobility, and sadness – work already begun by Virgil, but which the circumstances of Euryalus' death did not let be accentuated. In this death scene, which is linked to the expression of *horror*, Ovid favours idealizing motifs that allow him to reconnect with the sublime of the epic.[60] The fact remains that he does not produce an innovative work, but systematizes a process already outlined by his illustrious predecessor.

The same cannot be said for the expression of horror linked to Myrrha's incestuous desire, Caesar's death, and Philomela's rape. Despite the disparity of their situations, all these episodes have one obvious trait in common: they are scenes of transgression involving the body – sexual transgression in the case of Myrrha and Philomela, political transgression in the case of Caesar. In doing this, Ovid creates new epic themes of horror, such as rape:[61] never before had this type of aggression been explicitly equated in the epic with the expression of *horror ad odium*.[62] But the three episodes do not receive the same aesthetic treatment. The denunciation of Caesar's murder and Myrrha's incest stems solely from the use of the lexeme *horrere* – Ovid is content to use a watered-down aesthetic treatment of the two events. Although he may insist on the *horror* of Myrrha's desire, he hardly dwells on the embraces she shares with her father under the cover of night.[63] Likewise, although he links the *horror* experienced by the universe due to Caesar's death with that caused by Lycaon's cannibalism, he does not describe the murder of the general himself. The aesthetic conventions of the epic are thus respected, despite the *nefas* nature of the crimes denounced. The novelty introduced here into the field of epic horror by Ovid is therefore only thematic.

By contrast, for the rape of Philomela, Ovid punctuates the scene with macabre motifs that are rare in the *Metamorphoses*, in order to alert the reader to the major ethical violation in the episode.[64] This is emphasized in bold:

> The savage tyrant's wrath was aroused by these words, and his fear no less. Pricked on by both these spurs, he drew his sword which was hanging by his side in its sheath, caught her by the hair, and twisting her arms behind her back, he bound them fast. At sight of the sword Philomela gladly offered her throat to the stroke, filled with the eager hope of death. But he seized her tongue with pincers, as it protested against the outrage, calling ever on the name of her father and struggling to speak, and cut it off with his merciless blade. The mangled root quivers, while the severed tongue lies palpitating on the dark earth, faintly murmuring; and, as the severed tail of a mangled snake is wont to writhe, it twitches convulsively, and with its last dying movement seeks its mistress's feet. Even after this horrid deed—one would scarce believe it—the monarch is said to have worked his lustful will again and again upon the poor mangled form.
>
> *Ov.* Met. *6.549–62*

> Talibus ira feri postquam commota tyranni
> nec minor hac metus est, causa stimulatus utraque,
> quo fuit accinctus, uagina liberat ensem
> arreptamque coma fixis post terga lacertis
> uincla pati cogit; iugulum Philomela parabat
> spemque suae mortis uiso conceperat ense
> ille indignantem et nomen patris usque uocantem
> luctantemque loqui **conprensam forcipe linguam**
> abstulit ense fero. **Radix micat ultima linguae**,
> ipsa iacet **terraeque tremens** inmurmurat atrae,
> utque **salire** solet **mutilatae** cauda colubrae,
> **palpitat** et moriens dominae uestigia quaerit.
> Hoc quoque post facinus (uix ausim credere) fertur
> saepe sua lacerum repetisse libidine corpus.

The strong *euidentia* that characterizes the passage makes the repeated rape of Philomela, after which Tereus cut out her tongue so that she could not report the crime and left her dying, while the organ wriggled on the ground soaked in blood, one of the most unbearable scenes of violence in the *Metamorphoses*. In creating this passage, Ovid deliberately elaborates his narrative to make the rape a new theme of horror: through the double sexual transgression it represents, which mixes *stuprum* (rape) and *nefas* (incest) at the heart of an epic that proposes a new representation of the erotic body, the episode requires the erasure of any form of idealization or epic *maiestas.*[65] To better denounce the atrocity of the crime, Ovid resorts to an aesthetic reminiscent of the descriptive developments in Roman tragedy when *nefas* is reported: *uerba sordida* and dramatic approach produce an *imago agens* constituting the essential fundamentals of macabre *euidentia* emboldened in a tragic *color*.[66] Ovid undoubtedly seeks to invoke brutal emotions of terror, indignation, and disgust in his reader to accentuate the *horror ad odium* towards the torturer. He thus accentuates a procedure already used by Virgil in the *Aeneid,* although the latter exploits it only to question the *maiestas* of war in contexts of military violence, whereas Ovid uses it in reference to intra-family physical violence, including sexual assault among the physical horrors that occasionally mark the epic and ostensibly belong to tragedy.[67] Ovid's treatment of this myth is more surprising given that in the *Metamorphoses* he avoids applying a tragic aesthetic to the violence perpetrated by other traditional tragic heroes such as Medea.[68]

Bloody horrors and plant metamorphoses: 'Blood flowers'

Finally, a horrific image favoured by Ovid draws the reader's attention because of a haunting reiteration: it concerns scenes of plant metamorphosis linked to an initial act of violence that gives rise to the blossoming of real 'blood flowers'. One episode in the *Metamorphoses* is particularly emblematic of the transformation of macabre horror into delicate horror: the evocation of the blood flowing from Pyramus' self-inflicted wound, which the poet compares to a stream of water gushing from a broken pipe:

> As he lay stretched upon the earth the spouting blood leaped high; just as when a pipe has broken at a weak spot in the lead and through the small hissing aperture sends spurting forth long streams of water, cleaving the air with its jets. The fruit of the tree, sprinkled with the blood, was changed to a dark red colour; and the roots, soaked with his gore, also tinged the hanging berries with the same purple hue.
>
> *Ov.* Met. *4.121–7*

> Vt iacuit resupinus humo, cruor emicat alte,
> non aliter quam cum uitiato fistula plumbo
> scinditur et tenui stridente foramine longas
> eiaculatur aquas atque ictibus aera rumpit.
> Arborei fetus adspergine caedis in atram
> uertuntur faciem, madefactaque sanguine radix
> purpureo tinguit pendentia mora colore.

This image might have seemed grotesque, but Pyramus and Thisbe's despair in love, which imbues the scene with an elegiac sadness and tenderness,[69] prevents the reader from seeing in it as only grossly macabre. To the contrary, Ovid confers a certain delicacy on the scene[70] by playing with a comparison that introduces an image of a garden and by endowing the jet of blood with a fine verticality that is not without grace: the poet carefully avoided inserting *uerba sordida* into his text, and by using the verb *emicare* he attributes vitality and brilliance to the blood and mixes it in fine droplets with the air instead of impregnating the earth with it, as is the norm in epic.[71] He gives the bodily fluid a delicate filigree purity that is more reminiscent of fine goldsmithing or the art of elaborate gardens than of the impure, putrid mud that results from bloody spills in traditional epic.

The death of Pyramus probably has its imaginary origin in the *Aeneid:* the branches cut by Aeneas which drip crimson blood signalling the metamorphosis of Polydore, pierced by spears, into a shrub bristling with monstrous branches and evoking horror,[72] are clearly the source from which Ovid drew. But while the episode remains isolated in the *Aeneid*, in the *Metamorphoses* the bloody fruit of the mulberry tree at the foot of which Pyramus lies gives rise to a veritable imaginary germination; this echoes the story of the nymph Lotis, transformed into lotus stems that drip blood and tremble with *horror* when plucked by Dryope.[73] In addition, blood, which Ovid likes to represent as a precious, shimmering material,[74] repeatedly gives rise to delicate floral metamorphoses: *cruor in florem mutabitur* (*Met.* 10.728, death of Adonis), *flos de sanguine concolor ortus* (*Met.* 10.735, death of Adonis), *rubefactaque sanguine tellus / purpureum uiridi genuit de caespite florem* (*Met.* 13.394–5, death of Ajax, from which is born a flower similar to that of Hyacinthus).[75] Taking inspiration from Virgil, Ovid thus renews the horrifying theme his predecessor associated with this type of image: in the *Aeneid*, Polydore's transformation is a sign of punishment and causes Priam's son to suffer while provoking Aeneas' *horror ad odium*; in the *Metamorphoses*, this sort of transformation, likened to a flower blossoming, arouses more wonder than horror, especially since the purple hues Ovid associates with blood remove any macabre dimension from the organic liquid and transform each drop into a precious stone or graceful petal.

This unexpected refinement in the invention of *horroris imagines* is Ovid's personal hallmark. By combining the traditional terms of horror with precious delight, the poet encourages his reader to experience a delicate pleasure: a *delectatio* reserved for informed and refined purists capable of tasting the finesse of this ultimate metamorphic work, where the traditional macabre materials of the epic become the 'bijoux de filigrane'[76] of a new aesthetic.

Conclusion: From the garden of torments to the garden of delights

In the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid adopts the posture of an alchemist poet: like a goldsmith, he remodels, by hybridizing the macabre with the delicate, the traditional *horroris imagines* of the epic. In the *Metamorphoses*, the expression of *horror* can give rise to the creation of facetious horrors, capable of making the reader smile – provided that they recognize the transformations Ovid makes in the epic tradition through a skilful, witty mixing of the denotations and connotations conveyed by terms from the lexicon of *horrere*. Similarly, from being a repulsive, thick, spongy liquid, blood can be transformed in the *Metamorphoses* into a liquid whose shimmer evokes that of precious stones, or a floral liquid whose effusion is the source of improbable but magnificent blossoms. In addition, Ovid introduces new anatomical 'curiosities' into his epic that arouse horror, whether they concern the civil world, as in the case of rape, incest and tyrannicide, or enrich the catalogue of actions specific to the warrior world, such as enucleation, crucifixion and disembowelment. There is no doubt that the ingenuity and uniqueness of Ovidian horror appealed to Lucan, who proceeded with a systematic work of amplification. We thus find in the Neronian poet, in the form of real paintings, some bloody medallions invented by Ovid: scenes of enucleation, crucifixion and disembowelment enliven Book 3 of the *Pharsalia* in particular. In matters of horror, Ovid thus acts as an innovative intermediary on the path that leads from Virgilian *euidentia* to Lucanian *tumor*.

The poet's innovation nonetheless remains limited. Guided by the very subject of his poem, which implies splitting the work into multiple stories, Ovid proceeds to a fragmented writing of horror: he offers the reader only rare, short horrific medallions, which punctuate his work like tiny but vivid set jewels. Nor is the horror in the *Metamorphoses* as ideological in scope as that in the *Aeneid* or *Pharsalia*. The historical purpose that underlies Virgil's epic, but comes to the fore in Lucan's, confers a dimension of *utilitas* on any horror scene used in the two epics.[77] In the *Metamorphoses*, by contrast, no such discursive cohesion can be detected: the poetics of the fragments that characterize the work make it difficult to suppose a discourse that would be common to disparate legends. Ovid indulges in the aesthetic of the horrific medallion itself. In his refined research, the poet, fascinated by the singular horrific element, does not set up horror as a counterpoint system or an instrument of criticism; he only aims to set a scene of horror that surprises the reader and wins him over with its singularity. But the fragmentation and disparity of the legends in which the Ovidian horror scenes are inserted prevent tracing any meaningful link of continuity or echo between them. In summary, horror in the *Metamorphoses* seems essentially ornamental.

Notes

1. Miniconi 1951, Goldberg 1995: 153, Foucher 1997, Ripoll 1998.
2. Deremetz 1995, Vial 2010.
3. Arist. *Poet.* 5.49b9–16.
4. Ov. *Met*. 1.1–4 (*carmen perpetuum*): Hofmann 1985, Baldo 1986, Jouteur, 1998: 92–6.
5. Enn. *Ann*. 1.117–26; Ov. *Met*. 15.875–9. Coleman 1971: 476, Néraudau 1989: 149–51, Tronchet 1998: 202–5.
6. Néraudau 1989: 41–7.
7. Segal 1969a; 1971b.
8. Grimal 1953: 118; 1985: 173.
9. Grimal 1958: 245–57, Norwood 1964: 170–4.
10. Arist. *Poet*. 23.59a17–28.
11. Quint. *Inst*. 4.1.77 (critique of the composition of *Metamorphoses*).
12. Otis 1966 believes that the theme of love organizes the construction of the book into four parts. *A contrario* Néraudau 1989: 47–54 believes that the central subject remains that of metamorphosis.
13. Rosati 1981, Tronchet 1998: 139–45.
14. Jouteur 2001: 89–195, on the 'generic kaleidoscope' that this epic represents.
15. Jal 1963: 340, 402–11.
16. Luc. 1.93–5.
17. Néraudau 1989: 57–154, in particular 109–12 on the transition from myth to history.
18. Ov. *Met*. 15.745–851 (César); 15.855–70 (Auguste). On these two episodes, cf. Otis 1966: 99, 304, Néraudau 1989: 133–48, Fabre-Serris 1998: 97–8, Jouteur 2001: 230–3.
19. Néraudau 1989: 41–3.
20. Estèves 2020 and research profile : https://crises.www.univ-montp3.fr/fr/annuaire_recherche/aline-esteves
21. Estèves 2020: 129–37.
22. Serv. *Aen*. 1.165: *horror plerumque ad odium pertinet, plerumque ad uenerationem, ut hoc loco* ('The horror is often connected with hatred, often veneration, as in this passage').
23. Estèves 2020: 116–26.
24. Estèves 2020: 129–37.
25. Indeed, the frequency of use of the lexeme *horrere* in the *Metamorphoses* in relationship to the total number of words in the book is 0.0496% (39 proven terms), compared with 0.1302% in the *Aeneid* (83 proven terms), 0.0411% in the *Pharsalia* (21 proven terms), 0.1165% in the *Punica* (89 proven terms) and 0.1812% in the *Thebaid* (113 proven terms). Scenes of macabre horror remain rare in the work, and *uerba sordida* are poorly attested in it: for example, there

is only one instance of *cadauer* in Ovid's poem (*Met*. 7.602) but three of *cerebrum* (*Met*. 12.238; 289; 435), even though Virgil makes greater use of this type of sordid detail in his scenes of warlike horror: Estèves 2020: 201–3, 205.

26. Estèves 2020: 93–115.
27. Ov. *Met*. 1.126.
28. Lucr. 5.1298–349; for Virgil, Estèves 2020: 235 sq.
29. Ov. *Met*. 1.199–203; 4.133–6; 6.527–30; 601–2; 7.630–2; 9.345; 10.414–18; 14.198; 15.212; 298.
30. Ov. *Met*. 1.65; 216; 2.478; 3.38; 4.135; 778; 782; 6.530; 685; 704; 7.151; 631; 8.284; 285; 428; 9.345; 10.139; 191; 13.760; 846; 877; 14. 43; 198; 279; 15.212; 298; 471; 516.
31. Ov. *Met*. 4.135; 6.704.
32. Ov. *Met*. 4.778; 9.345; 10.191, etc.
33. Ov. *Met*. 2.478, bear; 3.38, snake; 6.530, dove; 8.284, 285, 428, wild boar of Calydon; 14.279, pig; 15.516, horse, etc.
34. Ov. *Met*. 1.65–6, Boreas; 4.782, Medusa; 7.151, the dragon guardian of the Golden Fleece; 13.760, Cyclopes; 846; 14.198; 15.212, the Winter.
35. Ov. *Met*. 1.65–6.
36. Ov. *Met*. 2.479–82; 3.35–8.
37. Ov. *Met*. 4.778.
38. Ov. *Met*., 13.846; 876–7. Fabre-Serris 1998: 63, 66, Jouteur 2001: 265–6.
39. Ov. *Met*. 10.139. Menzione 1964: 229.
40. Estèves 2020: 144–8.
41. Pianezzola 1979, Von Albrecht 1981.
42. Estèves 2020: 101–11.
43. Cf. e.g. Quint. *Inst*. 6.1.15–18; 6.2.31–2; 8.3.63–9.
44. Estèves 2020: 235–99.
45. Segal 1997, Jouteur 2001: 96–8, Schwartz 2013a.
46. Otis 1966: 283.
47. Ov. *Met*. 5.123–7: *Demere temptabat laeui quoque robora postis/ Cinyphius Pelates; temptanti dextera fixa est / cuspide Marmaridae Corythi lignoque cohaesit; / haerenti latus hausit Abas, nec corruit ille, / sed retinente manum moriens e poste pependit.* ('Cinyphian Pelates tried to tear away another bar from the left post, but in the act his right hand was pierced by the spear of Corythus of Marmarida and pinned to the wood. There fastened, Abas thrust him through the side; nor did he fall, but, dying, hung down from the post to which his hand was nailed', trans. F. J. Miller: 1916).
48. Ov. *Met*. 12.245–53: *Primus Ophionides Amycus penetralia donis / haut timuit spoliare suis et primus ab aede/ lampadibus densum rapuit funale coruscis/ elatumque alte, ueluti qui candida tauri / rumpere sacrifica molitur colla securi, / inlisit fronti Lapithae Celadontis et ossa/ non cognoscendo confusa relinquit in ore./ Exsiluere oculi, disiectisque ossibus oris / acta retro naris medioque est fixa palato.* ('First Amycus, Ophion's son, scrupled not to rob the inner sanctuary of its gifts, and first snatched from the shrine a chandelier thick hung with glittering lamps. This, lifted on high, as when one strives to break a bull's white neck with sacrificial axe, he dashed full at the head of Celadon, one of the Lapiths, crushing his face past recognition. His eyes leaped from their sockets, the bones of his face were shattered, and his nose driven back and fastened in his throat', trans. F. J. Miller: 1916; slightly adapted).

49. Ov. *Met*. 12.265–70: '*Non impune feres, teli modo copia detur!' / dixerat Exadius telique habet instar, in alta/ quae fuerant pinu uotiui cornua cerui. / Figitur hinc duplici Gryneus in lumina ramo/ eruiturque oculos, quorum pars cornibus haeret, / pars fluit in barbam concretaque sanguine pendet* ('"You shall not escape unscathed, if I may but lay hand upon a weapon." So cried Exadius, and found for weapon the antlers of a stag hung on a tall pine-tree as a votive offering. Gryneus' eyes were pierced by the double branching horns and his eyeballs gouged out. One of these stuck to the horn and the other rolled down upon his beard and hung there in a mass of clotted blood', trans. F. J. Miller: 1916).
50. Ov. *Met*. 13.385–92: *Quod cum uitare nequiret, / opposuit dextram passurae uulnera fronti: / adfixa est cum fronte manus; fit clamor, at illum/ haerentem Peleus et acerbo uulnere uictum / (stabat enim propior) mediam ferit ense sub aluum. / Prosiluit terraque ferox sua uiscera traxit/ tractaque calcauit calcataque rupit et illis/ crura quoque inpediit et inani concidit aluo* ('Since he could not dodge this, he threw up his right hand to protect his forehead from the wound. And there his hand was pinned against his forehead. A mighty shout arose, but Peleus, for he was near him, while the centaur stood pinned and helpless with that sore wound, smote him with his sword full in the belly. He leaped fiercely forward, trailing his entrails on the ground; and as he trailed he trod upon them and burst them as he trod, tangled his legs in them, and fell with empty belly to the earth', trans. F. J. Miller: 1916).
51. Menzione 1964: 158, Segal 1969b: 81.
52. There are thirty-nine occurrences of *cruor* in the *Metamorphoses*, three of *tabum*, two of *sanies*, one of *truncus* and one of *detruncare* in relation to the theme of body mutilation, and three of *cerebrum*.
53. Ov. *Met*. 10.188–95.
54. Ov. *Met*. 4.135.
55. Ov. *Met*. 10.414 Et 460. Menzione 1964: 170–6, Dupont 1985: 198, Galvagno 1995: 73–4, Fabre-Serris 1998: 112, 119.
56. Ov. *Met*. 6.530; 602. Menzione 1964: 178–80, Galvagno 1995: 87–8, Tronchet 1998: 528–30.
57. Ov. *Met*. 1.203. Néraudau 1989: 124–6, Fabre-Serris 1998: 42–3.
58. The text of the *Aeneid* is from the Loeb edition, Fairclough 1918; the English translation is also from Fairclough 1918.
59. The text of the *Metamorphoses* is from the Loeb edition, Miller 1916; the English translation is also from Miller 1916.
60. Menzione 1964: 230, Otis 1966: 352, Segal 1971a: 35, Galvagno 1995: 95.
61. With special interest nowadays: Curran 1978, Mower 2016, Marturano 2017, Newlands 2018, Freas 2018, Cowan 2020, Libatique 2021.
62. It is a theme borrowed from tragedy; see M. Biraud and E. Delbey, 2006, Delattre 2015.
63. Otis 1966: 188, Segal 1971a: 13, Galvagno 1995: 77, 80.
64. Segal 1994.
65. Galvagno 1995: 88.
66. Segal 1971a: 84.
67. Otis 1966: 83.
68. Jouteur 2001: 62–3.
69. Menzione 1964: 190–2, Jouteur 2001: 104–7.
70. Néraudau 1989: 80–6.

71. Mudry 2007, Estèves 2010.
72. Verg. *Aen*. 3.22–30.
73. Ov. *Met*. 9.344–5. Segal 1969b: 37–8.
74. Ov. *Met*. 2.607 (*puniceo*); 4.482–3 (*rubentem*); 728–9 (*puniceo*); 5.83 (*rutilum*); 8.383 (*rubefecit*); 11.19 (*rubuerunt*); 374–5 (*rubet*); 12.382 (*rubefacta*); 13.394–5 (*rubefactaque*); 887 (*puniceus*).
75. Ov. *Met*. 10.728: 'your blood shall be changed to a flower'; 10.735: 'a flower sprang up of blood-red hue'; 13.394–5: 'The ensanguined ground produced from the green sod a purple flower' (trans. F. J. Miller 1916).
76. Phrase borrowed from R. Caillois, *Les impostures de la poésie*, Paris, Gallimard, 1945: 78.
77. Estèves 2020: 305 sq.

Texts used

Only authors and texts quoted and translated in the body of the text are mentioned here. For authors and works that are simply mentioned, the abbreviations in the notes are those of the Oxford Classical Dictionary, available online: https://oxfordre.com/classics/fileasset/images/ORECLA/OCD.ABBREVIATIONS.pdf

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CHAPTER 8

LANDSCAPES AND BODIES OF HORROR IN SENECA'S *THYESTES*

Simona Martorana

Introduction

With its full range of connotations – including fear, repugnance and astonishment – horror is a prominent pattern in the *Thyestes*, perhaps the most gruesome of Seneca's dramas.[1] From its beginning, marked by the arrival of infernal creatures on earth, to the end, where Thyestes finds out about his teknophagy, the tragedy appears as an articulation of evil, chaos and abomination.[2] The plot is horrifying, with Atreus killing the sons of his brother Thyestes, who then eats their flesh, initially unaware of his actions. The descriptions are dreadful, as confirmed by the detailed account of Atreus' dismembering and cooking of the bodies of Thyestes' sons. The main characters within the drama, along with their ancestors, including Tantalus, are hideous. Often recalling the infernal landscape, the locations are permeated by an atmosphere of fear, darkness, and death.[3] Nature is no less horrible than the other facets of the drama, as it articulates and amplifies, on a cosmic level, moral evil and human *nefas* (namely that which goes against *fas*, divine law).[4]

In this chapter, I focus on a particular example of *locus horridus* in the *Thyestes*: the Tantalid house of Atreus.[5] Paralleled by descriptions of other royal palaces in the previous literary tradition (such as Latinus' house in Vergil's *Aeneid* 7),[6] the Pelopian *domus* is not simply an architectural background for Atreus' crimes, but rather forecasts and partakes in the ensuing dreadful events that occur in the drama. At the same time, Atreus' house evokes the topography of the underworld and features various natural phenomena, thereby representing a microcosm within the wider cosmic architecture of the *Thyestes*. By merging the features of an artificial, human building with the patterns of a typified mythological site (the underworld) as well as the natural landscape, Atreus' palace configures itself as a liminal space of violation and transgression.[7] To shed further light on the meanings and agency of the Pelopian house, I combine textual analysis with theories drawn from new materialist approaches (particularly those of Jane Bennett, Jeffrey J. Cohen and Bruno Latour), which underscore the 'vibrancy' of natural features and objects and their interrelation with animate beings. Within Atreus' palace, the borders between human and non-human collapse, the difference between *fas* and *nefas* disappears, and horror emerges as an escalating, overwhelming feeling.

The *Pelopia domus*, the literary tradition and Seneca's *Natura*

The description of Atreus' palace (641–90) represents the first part of a long Messenger speech, which also includes the account of the murder of Thyestes' sons, perpetrated by Atreus. Building upon a well-established literary tradition, Seneca casts the Messenger as the quintessential bearer of bad news.[8] In this case, the Messenger's account is solicited by the Chorus, who ask him to recount 'what is the reason why' he is 'horrified' (*quid sit quod horres*, 639) and to indicate 'the author', namely the person responsible for his repulsion (*auctorem indica*, 639).[9] The proleptic use of the verb *horreo* sets the scene for the creation of the horrific atmosphere that dominates the house of Atreus.[10] Defined as an intrusion of the underworld into the upperworld, the Pelopian house is an architectural manifestation of Atreus' tyrannic power.[11] In terms of literary models, the *domus* of Atreus has been said to combine the description of King Latinus' palace in *Aeneid* 7 with elements from Cacus' grotto (*Aeneid* 8), as well as presenting features of the Vergilian (and accordingly Homeric) underworld.[12] Aside from being presented as an infernal landscape, Atreus' house also includes natural features that are antithetical to the *locus amoenus*, thus adhering to the *topos* of the *locus horridus*.[13] This *locus horridus* articulates, at the architectural and physical level, the moral evil that characterizes the drama throughout.[14]

The overlap between the physical (or aesthetic) dimension and the moral sphere conforms to the Stoic materialistic and organistic view of the cosmos, which postulates a connection between material and immaterial components of the world, between concrete and abstract dimensions.[15] This overlap goes beyond the so-called *interpretatio Stoica* of Senecan dramas,[16] and can be found as a recurring pattern in other tragedies: in the *Oedipus*, the plague of Athens, and its associated apocalyptic landscape, is a consequence of Oedipus' parricide and incest (*Oed.* 1–81);[17] in the *Agamemnon*, the storm tormenting Agamemnon's fleet articulates the crimes of the Achaean army, and forecasts the dramatic events that follow in the drama (406–578); finally, Medea's revenge requires the *sympathy*, and cooperation, of an altered natural landscape, including animals as well as divine and monstrous creatures (cf. *Med.* 740–842).[18] In Senecan drama, the Stoic concept of *Natura* as cosmic *ratio* (or *logos*) coexists with the more concrete representation of nature as an aesthetic space, which can be contemplated and experienced on a physical level.[19] By incorporating architectural elements, literary *topoi*, and natural features, Atreus' house is placed at the crossroads between a humanized, artificial space and a highly personified natural world:

> On the summit of the citadel is a section of the House of Pelops that faces south. Its outer flank rises up like a mountain, hemming in the city and holding in striking range a populace defiant of its kings. Here is a vast gleaming hall, room enough for a multitude, its gilded roof beams supported by columns with conspicuous varied markings. Behind these rooms, visible to everyone, where whole peoples pay court, the wealthy house goes back into space upon space.[20]
>
> *Sen.* Thy. *641–9*

> In arce summa Pelopiae pars est domus
> conversa ad austros, cuius extremum latus
> aequale monti crescit atque urbem premit
> et contumacem regibus populum suis
> habet sub ictu. fulget hic turbae capax 645
> immane tectum, cuius auratas trabes
> variis columnae nobiles maculis ferunt.
> post ista vulgo nota, quae populi colunt,
> in multa dives spatia discedit domus.

Visualized through the eyes of the Messenger, the *domus Pelopia* towers from a high place (*in arce summa*, 641) and encloses the city (*urbem premit*, 643), thereby displaying its function of control and power.[21] The comparison between the *extremum latum*, the furthest flank of the palace (642), and a mountain articulates the overlap between purely architectural features and natural elements that characterizes the description of the house throughout. Moreover, the linguistic choices of these lines make the house appear personified and quasi-animated: the furthest flank literally 'grows' (*crescit*, 643), (op)presses the city (643), and holds it (*habet*, 645) under its power.[22] The *immane tectum*, the 'enormous hall' (with a widespread metonymy of *tectum* for 'house' or 'room'), underlines the monstrosity and excess of the house, which reflects the hubristic temper of its owner (Atreus).[23] The adjective *immane* often qualifies 'monstrous' and 'enormous' creatures of mythology, who lie between the realms of wild and dangerous animals, and true monsters.[24] This sort of animality of the house is further confirmed by the word *maculis* ('markings', 647), which often denotes the hair of animals (and is sometimes a marker of moral corruption), but here refers to the columns.[25] Besides the visible spaces, the house also 'goes back' (*discedit*; 649) to hidden quarters, concealing them from public view, as an animated being (either human or animal) would do to hide from the sight of others. To borrow a phrase from Jane Bennett, the *Pelopia domus* can be said to emerge from this description as 'a vibrant object',[26] since it seems to hold the agency that characterizes animated beings. Accordingly, the Pelopian house articulates human actions and conveys feelings and emotions, thereby contributing to the development of the plot.[27] Compared to the rest of the building, the most remote section of the house is even more liminal between its status as an animate being and an inanimate object, and between the underworld and the upperworld:

> At the farthest and lowest remove there lies a secret area that confines an age-old woodland in a deep vale – the inner sanctum of the realm. There is no tree here that stretches out healthy branches and is tended with the knife, but yews and cypresses nod and a dark wood of black ilex, over which a towering oak looks down from its height and dominates the grove.
>
> *Sen.* Thy. *650–6*

> arcana in imo regio secessu iacet, 650
> alta vetustum valle compescens nemus,

penetrale regni, nulla qua laetos solet
praebere ramos arbor aut ferro coli,
sed taxus et cupressus et nigra ilice
obscura nutat silva, quam supra eminens
despectat alte quercus et vincit nemus.

While accompanying the Messenger's descriptive eye, we move vertically, from up to down, in a sort of *katabasis*. The *penetrale regni* is described by the Messenger's narrative, yet one gets the impression that it is the house – and not the Messenger – that progressively unveils its own secrets for the readers (or audience).[28] The most hidden area of the house (*arcana*, 650) 'lies' (*iacet*, 650) in the lowest remove of the palace (*imo*, 650), encircling an old woodland in a deep valley (*alta … valle*, 651), which recalls the depth and darkness that normally characterize the infernal world.[29] This is the *sancta sanctorum* of Atreus' palace (*penetrale regni*, 652), where trees do not offer any fruit, nor are they cultivated with human techniques (652–3).[30] The landscape is characterized by the absence of (normal) life, as denoted by the lack of vegetable products. Referring to the tree branches (*ramos*, 653), the adjective *laetus* holds an ambivalent meaning, as it can be translated both as 'fruitful' and 'happy' (or 'healthy').[31] By saying that the branches are not *laetos*, Seneca plays with the double meaning of the adjective, thus highly personifying the trees. Moreover, the mention of the trees bearing no fruit evokes, analogically and at the same time antithetically, the punishment of Tantalus, who features prominently at the beginning of (and throughout) the tragedy as an ancestor of Atreus and Thyestes.[32] In the underworld, Tantalus is suspended beneath a fruit tree and close to a pool of water, but despite his hunger and thirst, he can neither eat the fruit nor drink the water.[33] While the echo of Tantalus' torment establishes a link between the *nemus* and the underworld, the intact and wild vegetation sets the frame of a sacred space – since sacred plants were usually not cut or touched by human hands.[34]

The trees populating the *nemus* are obscure and ominous, such as yews and cypresses (654), as well as a towering oak; dark colours dominate the landscape (cf. *nigra*, 'black', 654; *obscura*, 'dark', 655).[35] Both the wood and the oak tree are actively involved in the process of revelation, and accordingly narrative construction, of the place: the wood 'nods' (*nutat*, 655), whereas the oak 'looks down' (*despectat*, 656) and 'surpasses' (*vincit*, 656) the grove.[36] The partial absence of (animated) life in the *penetrale regni* is counterbalanced by the agency of the trees and natural features, whose attitudes and appearance anticipate Atreus' dreadful actions. The sense of horror is conveyed not only by the dark and ominous atmosphere, but also by the anxiety that arises from the absence of ontological boundaries between animated and inanimate entities.

In his book *Facing Gaia*, Bruno Latour talks about a 'redistribution of agency' between human and inhuman entities, whereby the inhuman components of the world contribute to reconceiving and reshaping reality.[37] In Latour's ontological and gnoseological view, Gaia stands as an immanent principle, which permeates our (human and limited) experience of the world.[38] In other words, Gaia compels us to rethink nature as an active organism and therefore to displace the central role of humans, who are invested with the same level of agency as other non-human entities.[39] In this particular section of the description of Atreus' house, human activity seems to be entirely replaced by the agency of the house, and the natural world existing in and animating it, which acts as an additional, quasi-human, character. Taking centre stage, the house sits above the other (human) characters, producing action, anticipating certain aspects of the narrative and reframing the plot.

In the following lines, human intervention is progressively reintroduced, so that it coexists, overlaps, and eventually merges with non-human forces. The *penetrale regni* is where the descendants of Tantalus inaugurate their rule (*hinc auspicari regna Tantalidae solent*, 657), as well as asking for help in dubious or difficult situations (*petere lassis rebus ac dubiis opem*, 658).[40] Votive gifts (*dona*, 659), namely symbolic objects, occupy the place: *vocales tubae* ('bruiting trumpets'; 659), *fracti currus* ('broken chariots'; 660), *victae … rotae* ('wheels … defeated'; 661), and every *facinus* of Atreus' stock, *omne gentis facinus* (662, where the word *facinus* can be understood as both neutral, 'deed', and more negatively connoted, 'crime').[41] Finally, the place features the Phrygian cap of Pelops (*Phrygius … tiaras Pelopis*, 663), along with the cape of his triumphs (*chlamys*, 665).[42] Described in detail and displayed upon the (literal or figurative) stage, the *dona* carry with them what can be defined as 'affective energy'.[43] As symbolic and ritual gifts, these *dona* become proxies of certain actions and restage them, thereby blurring the boundaries between subjects (the characters) and objects. Moreover, the objects' aesthetic (and highly emphasized) presence carries the unsettling reality of a non-presence, namely the absence of human characters. By contributing to the creation of an eerie and horrific atmosphere, the objects listed forecast, intervene in, and redirect the agency of the characters, thereby collapsing the distinctions between human and non-human. The overlap of human and non-human spheres also extends to the otherworldly dimension, which is evoked through the description of other natural features:

> In the shadow is a dismal stagnant spring, which stays indolent, producing a black swamp. Such is the disgusting stream of dread Styx, which guarantees good faith in heaven. Here in the blind darkness rumour has it that death gods groan; the grove resounds to the rattling of chains, and ghosts howl. Anything fearful to hear can be seen there. A hoary crowd walks abroad, released from their ancient tombs, and things more monstrous than any known caper about the place. In addition, a fire repeatedly flickers throughout the wood, and the lofty tree trunks burn without fire. Often the grove booms with threefold barking, often the house is awed by huge apparitions. Daytime does not stop the fear: the night inhabits the grove, and an eerie sense of the underworld rules in broad daylight.
>
> *Sen.* Thy. *665–79*

fons stat sub umbra tristis et nigra piger 665
haeret palude: talis est dirae Stygis
deformis unda quae facit caelo fidem.

> hinc nocte caeca gemere ferales deos
> fama est, catenis lucus excussis sonat
> ululantque manes. quidquid audire est metus
> illic videtur. Errat antiquis vetus
> emissa bustis turba et insultant loco
> maiora notis monstra. quin tota solet
> micare silva flamma, et excelsae trabes
> ardent sine igne. saepe latratu nemus
> trino remugit, saepe simulacris domus
> attonita magnis. nec dies sedat metum:
> nox propria luco est, et superstitio inferum
> in luce media regnat.

The natural features distort and overturn the patterns of the traditional *locus amoenus* (such as springs, streams and pools, as well as silence and solitude), thus transforming it into a *locus horridus*.[44] While the description is highly visual, the place is dominated by darkness and formlessness, which represent a negation of light, colour and sight. Besides the shade, the swamp is said to be *nigra* (665), namely black, whereas the stream of the Styx is *deformis* (667), literally without an identifiable shape, as well as antithetic to *formosa*, 'beautiful'.[45] Moreover, the adjectives *tristis* ('sad', 'dismal'; 665), *piger* (literally, 'lazy', 'slow'; 665), and *dirus* ('dread'; 666) are often employed to qualify moral or emotional states of human beings, whereas *deformis* accentuates the monstrous and horrific nature of the place. At the same time, the spring of water, the *unda* and the mention of the Styx evoke the framework of Tantalus' punishment, thus further contributing to the construction of an infernal atmosphere.[46] The agentic aspects of the landscape are emphasized in the following lines, where the grove appears to be animated by uncanny creatures, such as infernal deities (*feralis deos*, 668), ghosts (670), hoary shadows (672) and monsters 'greater than what is known' (673).[47] These creatures are visually incorporated into the landscape, as well as partaking in the production of its sounds: rattling chains (*catenis … excussis*, 669), howling (cf. *ululant*, 670) and barking (*latratu*, 675). Through a synesthetic expression, the narrator states that 'anything fearful to *hear* can be *seen* there' (670–1), whereby sight and hearing are merged in a joint perception. The appearance of the place results from the combination of various elements of the landscape, which are endowed with vibrancy, thus blurring the boundaries between active and passive, non-human or animated beings and inanimate objects.[48] The centrality of the landscape counterbalances the absence of human beings: the landscape is both embedded in the text (through visual descriptions) and at the same time generates the text and its semantics.[49] This nature-text contains multiple meanings arising from the landscape, which contribute to the creation of the narrative, thereby displacing the role of humans as the main actors – and interpreters – of the events.

Natural objects, along with a combination of divine or demonic entities, magic forces and natural phenomena, are also the main agents of the story at the syntactic and semantic levels. The presence of the flickering flame (*flamma*, 674) and the tree trunks (*trabes*, 674) burning without fire leads to the creation of an unreal, ultra-human atmosphere, as well as adding another element (namely fire) to a landscape already dominated by infernal waters and chthonic creatures (pertaining to the earthly dimension).[50] While barking (670) belongs to auditory perception, the 'huge apparitions' (*simulacris … magnis*) scaring the house (*domus / attonita*, 676–7) pertain to the visual sphere. The visual dimension is further emphasized through further negation of light, as night darkness descends on the grove (*nox propria luco est*, 678) and the *superstitio inferum* (the 'perception' of the underworld) dominates in the middle of daylight.[51] Once again, agency is bestowed upon the *nemus* ('the grove'), which is said to 'bellow back' with a barking, as well as the house, struck (*attonita*) by other-worldly apparitions (676–7).[52] The ensuing opposition between (day)light and night further articulates the centrality of natural elements, sidelining human agency. In this section of the drama, human activity does not stand out vis-à-vis objects or non-human forces, but rather coexists with them. While cooperating with Atreus in the perpetuation of the murder of his nephews, the landscape also seems to *sympathetically* incorporate human feelings, particularly those of Thyestes' sons and the intended readers, as well as emphasizing the impiety of Atreus' deeds. By anticipating and affecting the account of Atreus' murder, the *penetrale regni* combines natural horror and human violence.

(In)human horror: Atreus' *nefas*

The Messenger introduces the description of the murder of Thyestes' sons through an emphatic question, *quis queat digne eloqui?* ('who could express it properly?'; 684), which conveys both the atrocity of Atreus' actions and the rhetorical, semantic and linguistic difficulty of describing them.[53] The murder is presented as a distorted enactment of a sacrificial ritual (cf. 682–90), whose cruelty transgresses human boundaries.[54] The abhorrence of this deviant ritual is first expressed, at a stylistic and rhetorical level, through an excess of negation, as the Messenger says that 'every part (*ordo*) of the ritual is kept, to ensure that such impiety is performed by the rules' (*ne tantum nefas /non rite fiat*; 689–90).[55] Just as the *penetrale regni* is visually described in terms of an absence of light, with a prevalence of darkness, blackness and shadows, so the murder by Atreus is anticipated through a series of denials, which articulate, on a semantic and rhetorical level, a lack of speech – and words.

The scene of the murder (and cooking) of Thyestes' sons prominently features horrific and disgusting details. Alongside being read as a distorted sacrifice (cf. *sacerdos*, 'priest', 691; *aras*, 'altars', 693; lines 690–5), the murder has been interpreted as a perverted artistic or literary creation, where Atreus would take on the role of a brutal artist, as well as the creator of the narrative.[56] Most recently, the killing and cooking of Thyestes' sons has attracted scholarly attention for its references to anatomical details and medical language, which would accordingly paint the picture of Atreus as a monstrous physician.[57] Developing the arguments made in the previous section, in the following pages I will focus on the quasi-personification of natural features, as well as the linguistic and thematic links between the description of Atreus' house and the 'dissection' of the two boys, thereby shedding further light on the (co-)agency of the *penetrale regni* in the murder of Thyestes' sons.

As Atreus gets ready to kill the two boys, the *lucus* ('grove') trembles (*tremescit*, 696), the palace sways, following a shaking of the earth (*succusso solo*, 696), which can be interpreted as an actual earthquake. The expression indicating the swaying of the palace, *nutavit aula* (697), recalls the movement of the *silva* at 655 (*nutat*), thereby producing an overlap between the humanized environment of the house and a natural element.[58] Furthermore, the *aula* is qualified as *dubia* (697), 'uncertain', just as the situations in which Tantalus' family was said to ask for responses (cf. line 658, *dubiis*). The palace (along with its incorporated landscape) becomes a proxy for Atreus' family history and dreadful actions. The coexistence of human and non-human elements reverberates onto the linguistic choices, as verbs and adjectives such as *tremescit*, *succusso*, *nutavit* and *dubia* animate and almost humanize the grove, the earth and the palace, respectively (696–8). Similar to a person running, a *sidus* ('star' or 'comet') crosses the sky (*cucurrit*, 'ran'; 699) and carries a black trail (*atrum … limitem … trahens*, 699), thus recalling the antithesis between the prominence of visual aspects (such as the star) and the darkness characterizing the *penetrale regni*, which is de facto an absence of light and visibility.[59]

These prodigies, *monstra*, which at line 673 were 'greater than what is known', affect everything, with the exception of Atreus, who remains untouched: *movere cunctos monstra, sed solus sibi / immotus Atreus constat* ('the portents move everything; Atreus alone remains fixed, unmoved'; 703–4).[60] While contributing to the creation of an appropriate atmosphere for the assassination-sacrifice of the two boys, the agency of the landscape also contrasts Atreus' attitude. The whole palace, along with the natural world featured within it, is shaken, trembles and moves, showing its vibrancy. While this agency of non-human, or ultra-human (that is, otherworldly) entities is in antithesis to Atreus' passivity, Atreus is the only character who apparently performs active and factual deeds (the murder of the two boys) in this section of the drama: the Chorus simply listen to and briefly comment upon the account of the Messenger, who in turn has a purely narrative function. The paradox of Atreus' immobility further collapses and overturns the borders between active and passive, human and non-human entities. This blurring of distinctions takes an additional meaning in the following lines, where Atreus is described as a savage animal:

> As in the woods by the Ganges a hungry tigress wavers between two young bulls, craving each prey and uncertain where to sink her teeth first (she turns her gaping jaws here, turns them back there and keeps her hunger suspended), so dread Atreus surveys the victims consecrated to his godless anger.
>
> *Sen.* Thy. *707–13*

> ieiuna silvis qualis in Gangeticis
> inter iuvencos tigris erravit duos,

> utriusque praedae cupida, quo primum ferat
> incerta morsus; flectit hoc rictus suos, 710
> illo reflectit et famem dubiam tenet:
> sic dirus Atreus capita devota impiae
> speculatur irae.

The comparison between Atreus and a tigress from the Indian woods not only emphasizes the non-human component of Atreus' identity, but also recalls a similar parallel between Procne and an Indian tigress, which anticipates Procne's murder and cooking of her son in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*: *nec mora, traxit Ityn, veluti Gangetica cervae / lactentem fetum per silvas tigris opacas* ('without delay, she dragged Itys away, as a tigress drags a suckling fawn through the dark woods on Ganges' banks'; 6.636–7).[61] Furthermore, the lexical choices establish a link with the previous description of the *penetrale regni*, where the *aula* was *dubia* (697), whereas the tigress is here *incerta* (710) and her personified *famem* ('hunger') is *dubiam* (711).[62] Indeed, the fluctuation of the *aula* at 697–8 (*dubia quo pondus daret / ac fluctuanti similis*; 'uncertain which way to topple and seeming to waver') is evoked here by the doubts of the tigress concerning which bullock to attack first. The continuous overlap of human and non-human spheres confirms the identity between Atreus and his palace, the tyrant and non-human features of the landscape.[63] In this *mundus inversus*, not only does the *penetrale regni* materialize Atreus' plans, but Atreus also becomes the materialization of the *Pelopia domus*.[64] In other words, Atreus is a component of the monstrous, prodigious and animated house just as much as the other non-human elements belonging to the palace. Atreus is a single unit in a chain of events that lead to the accomplishment of the fate of an entire dynasty, embodied by the *domus Pelopia*.[65] The reference to the *ira* ('anger', 713) further articulates Atreus' inhumanity, as in Seneca's philosophical prose anger is the hallmark of a lack of rationality as well as a departure from human nature: it de-humanizes people, making them comparable to animals or monsters.[66]

The first victim of Atreus' anger is Thyestes' first son, Tantalus, whose name ominously recalls that of his ancestor (cf. 717–18). Atreus is said to bury, or conceal (*abscondit*, 722), his sword in a wound he had already made, pushing in deep (*penitus premens*, 722) until he reaches the throat with his hand (*iugulo manum commisit*, 723).[67] Some patterns of Atreus' acts evoke the features of the *penetrale regni*, which is also hidden or concealed, as well as extending in depth (cf. *alta … valle*, 651), like the sword penetrating Tantalus' flesh. Once pierced, the body of Tantalus stays upright (723–4), as immobile as Atreus was vis-à-vis the animated elements of the landscape (703–4). After long hesitating about the direction of its fall, the corpse of Tantalus falls on its uncle: *cumque dubitasset diu / hac parte an illa caderet, in patruum cadit* ('having been long unsure / which way to fall, then [the corpse] fell on its uncle'; 724–5).[68] These doubts concerning the direction of the fall, as well as the verb *dubito*, recall both the *aula … dubia* at 697 and the hunger of Atreus-tigress at 711 (*famem dubiam*). Alongside Atreus, the (soon-to-be) dismembered corpse of Thyestes' son also changes into and merges with the Tantalid *domus*, as well as losing its humanity.

Thyestes' second child, Plisthenes, is also incorporated into the landscape, as his body, with the neck severed (*cervice caesa*; 728), is said to have become a *truncus* ('trunk'; 728) falling forward, while the head 'rolls away, mumbling some unintelligible protest' (*querulum cucurrit murmure incerto caput*, 729).[69] Both the expression *cervice caesa* (728) and the word *truncus* can be used to indicate the parts of a tree, namely the head (*cervix*) and the trunk, whereas the murmur recalls the sounds of the monstrous creatures inhabiting the grove at lines 668–71.[70] While the corpses of the two boys momentarily merge with the landscape, Atreus is once again compared to an animal, namely the Armenian lion (*Armenia leo*, 732), who does not stop his anger (*non ponit iras*, 735). Like the lion who persecutes its prey, Atreus (*non aliter Atreus*, 737) perseveres in his brutal slaughter even after the death of the two boys: *saevit atque ira tumet* ('rages, swollen with anger'; 737).[71] Anger – repeated twice in the space of a few lines – is the signal that Atreus is not simply comparable to a lion, a beast, but that he has transformed into a beast.

After listening to Atreus' horrific deeds, the Chorus' leader asks whether '*natura* has room for anything still greater or more atrocious' (*an ultra maius aut atrocius / natura recipit?*; 745–6), thereby openly placing nature at the forefront in the performance, accomplishment and reception of the dramatic action.[72] *Natura* is not simply a spectator of what is happening in the play, but a co-actor and participant in the performance of the murders. While cutting the *cervix* of Thyestes' son, Atreus offends the landscape and at the same time contributes to the process of amalgamation of Thyestes' sons into the landscape. Aside from the Chorus, the Messenger also regards natural elements as animated beings, when he hopes that 'earth does not hide the dead, nor fire consumes them' (*ne tegat functos humus / nec solvat ignis*; 749–50).[73] It is better that the corpses are left to birds or to beasts to be devoured (*avibus epulandos licet / ferisque triste pabulum saevis trahat*; 750–1), rather than undergo what is about to happen, namely Atreus' dissection and cooking.[74] Contrary to what the Chorus wish, the natural world does not oppose, or hide, Atreus' actions but rather incorporates them. As soon as Atreus has killed the two boys, he starts extracting their entrails, which are said to 'tremble', with the veins pulsing and the hearts throbbing in terror: *erepta vivis exta pectoribus tremunt / spirantque venae corque adhuc pavidum salit* (755–6).[75] The trembling of the organs recalls the trembling of the grove, as well as the movement of the earth (*succusso solo*) at line 696, whereas the pulsing of the veins and throbbing of the hearts evoke the 'vibrant' nature at lines 667–79. Just as the individual elements of the landscape seem to be provided with a life of their own, so the organs of the corpses of Thyestes' sons appear to still retain life, thus once again challenging traditional notions of the human body, as well as human bodily boundaries. The corpses of the two boys have lost their identity as unitary bodies and appear as 'assemblages' of disjointed parts (as Jane Bennett would put it).[76] As assemblages, they lack a central head and a recognizable identity, but their parts are provided with an autonomous existence and agency.

This agency can also be found at lines 770–2, after Atreus has started cooking the dismembered bodies. The liver (*iecur*) is said to hiss, *stridet* (770), whereas the narrator ironically comments that it is not easy to say 'whether the bodies or flames groan more loudly': *nec facile dicas corpora an flammae magis / gemuere* (771–2).[77] The groaning attributed to the bodily pieces evokes the sounds emerging from the landscape of the *penetrale regni*, particularly the groaning of ultra-human (namely, divine or infernal) creatures (cf. *gemere … deos*; 668). The smoke rising from the cooking bodies is *tristis* (773), namely 'sad' and 'ill-omened', quasi-personified just as the *fons* was in the dark *lucus* at 665; heavy with clouds, the smoke does not rise straight (*non rectus exit*; 774), but smothers the house gods (*ipsos penates*, 775) in a horrid cloud: the adjective *deformis* here qualifies the cloud, but at the same time once again evokes the grove, where the stream was *deformis* (667). The animation of the dismembered corpses, along with the personification of some atmospheric elements, contributes to the creation of a scene of horror. Horror materializes and becomes tangible in the final lines of the Messenger's speech (776–88), which describe Thyestes' meal of the flesh of his sons:

> O long-enduring Phoebus! Though you have fled backward, snatched the day from midheaven and drowned it, you set too late. The father is mangling his sons, gnawing his own limbs with entombing teeth. He is glistening, with hair soaked in flowing unguent, and he is heavy with wine. Often his blocked throat holds the food. In your troubles there is this one boon, Thyestes, that you are ignorant of your troubles! But this too will perish. Though the Titan has turned his chariot, tracing a path counter to himself, and though the foul deed is smothered in strange darkness by this oppressive night, released from the East and at an alien time, yet see you must. All your troubles will be revealed.
>
> *Sen.* Thy. *776–88*

> O Phoebe patiens, fugeris retro licet
> medioque raptum merseris caelo diem,
> sero occidisti! lancinat natos pater
> artusque mandit ore funesto suos;
> nitet fluente madidus unguento comam
> gravisque vino est; saepe praeclusae cibum
> tenuere fauces. in malis unum hoc tuis
> bonum est, Thyesta, quod mala ignoras tua.
> sed et hoc peribit. verterit currus licet
> sibi ipse Titan obvium ducens iter,
> tenebrisque facinus obruat taetrum novis
> nox missa ab ortu tempore alieno gravis,
> tamen videndum est. tota patefient mala.

The description starts with an invocation to a personified natural and divine element, *Phoebus* (776), namely the sun, who is qualified as *patiens* ('long-enduring', 776).[78] While observing Phoebus' disappearance, which has been read as an eclipse, the Messenger also notes that the sun set too late: *sero occidisti*. Besides being a widespread literary pattern, the Messenger's invocation bestows autonomous agency to a natural element, which does not match human expectations or wishes. This disavowal of the Messenger's expectations further sidelines human actors and reduces their agency, thereby making them appear helpless and ineffective. Thyestes swallows the flesh of his sons without realizing it (*in malis unum hoc tuis / bonum est, Thyesta, quod mala ignoras tua*; 782–3), in a cannibalistic meal that is juxtaposed with Tantalus' inability to eat and drink (cf. 4–6, 68–9, 152–75). As though exhibiting an independent agency, a part of Thyestes' body, the throat, tries to avoid the food: *saepe praeclusae cibum / tenuere fauces* ('often his blocked throat holds the food'; 781–2). Following the abominable meal, the sun (addressed as 'Titan'; 785) turns back his chariot, going against his own course (*obvium*, 785), so that the night (*nox*, 787) can cover the *facinus … taetrum* ('the foul deed'; 786). Placed in the subject position, the night closes the Messenger's speech, reiterating the motif of darkness, which is always accompanied by the opposite element, namely light. Despite the obscurity, it is still possible to witness Thyestes' deeds, with a visual revelation of the *mala*, 'evils': *tota patefient mala* ('all your troubles will be revealed').[79] The antithetical coexistence of darkness and light, which is determined by a combination of natural elements and human actions, serves to further emphasize the sense of horror generated by Atreus' and Thyestes' *nefas*.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I hope to have shown how the spatial context of the House of Pelops partakes in the perpetration of the murder of Thyestes' sons, thereby engendering an atmosphere of fear, disgust and consternation – in a word, horror. The *domus Pelopia*, along with the natural world embedded in it, is not simply a background of the dramatic action but is endowed with agency. The animation of landscape features and objects opposes the partial absence, or lack of agency, of human characters. If human characters are present, they either hold a purely narrative or secondary function (the Messenger, the Chorus), or they are everything but human, as is the case for Atreus. The reversal in the attribution of active and passive roles, as well as the blurring of boundaries between human, animal and monster in the depiction of Atreus, leads to a reconsideration of the notion of human agency. What produces a sense of horror in the episode of the murder of Thyestes' sons is not simply, or not primarily, human action, but the cooperation between human actions and non-human entities, including landscape features, objects pertaining to Atreus' house, and ultra-human creatures. Horror is not a consequence of Atreus' and Thyestes' misdeeds but is intrinsic to the landscape. By enhancing the idea that ontological boundaries are not fixed, the intercommunicability between landscape features and human actions amplifies the existential anxiety and horrific perception that feature throughout the episode.

Notes

1. Many thanks to George Kazantzidis and Chiara Thumiger for their invitation to contribute to this volume. I am also grateful to the audiences at HU Berlin and The University of

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A general introduction to the *Thyestes* can be found in Torre 2014: 501–11, Boyle 2017: LXIX–CXIII.

2. For the beginning, see Anliker 1960, Frangoulidis 2017: 179–90, Martorana 2022: 269–84; for the cannibalistic meal as a result of Atreus' revenge, see e.g. Aygon 2003: 271–84, Accardi 2011: 224–8.
3. Natural and human spaces in Seneca's *Thyestes* have often been interpreted as an articulation of the underworld: see Erasmo 2006: 196, Faber 2007: 434–7; also Mans 1984: 101–19, Petrone 1986–7: 131–43.
4. On *nefas* in the *Thyestes*, see Mowbray 2012: 393–407; for *natura* in Seneca's drama, see Boyle 1985: 1284–347, Vottero 1998: 291–303, Fedeli 2000: 25–45, Rosenmeyer 2000: 99–119, Matias 2009.
5. For Atreus' house as a *locus horridus*, see Smolenaars 1998: 51–65; Schiesaro 2006: 441–3; on this topos, see also Gaertner 2005: on *Tr*. 1.3.84.
6. Faber 2007: 435.
7. For the overlap between natural and artificial spaces in Atreus' palace, see Unruh 2014: 251; for spaces as articulations of emotions, and fear more specifically, in classical literature, see the volume by Felton 2018.
8. For similar *ekphraseis*, cf. *HF* 662–96, 709–18, *Tro*. 1068–87, *Oed*. 530–47, and *Ag*. 558–67; see Boyle 2017: on *Thy*. 641–82.
9. According to Boyle (2017: on 638–40), these questions emphasize the metatheatrical role of the Messenger as the *editor*, namely the producer, of the performance, whereas Atreus would be the *auctor* ('author') of the spectacle (cf. line 639). For the role of Atreus as the architect of the tragedy, see e.g. Schiesaro 2003: 70–138. While it would be interesting to explore how Atreus' palace could have been represented on an actual theatrical stage, the discussion about the performability of Senecan dramas, along with the performance debate as a whole, is not central to this chapter. For a review of scholarship and literature on the issue of performability of Senecan dramas, see Fitch 2000: 1–12, Boyle 2017: XL–XLII.
10. Mader 2000: 153–72, Michelon 2011: 251–3.
11. 'Later in the play, a messenger describes an eerie grove within Atreus' house in which the Underworld intrudes upon the world above, thus reversing the intrusion of the Upper world on the Underworld in the first choral ode',* Erasmo 2006: 195; see also Faber 2007: 434. For the Pelopian *domus* as a representation of Atreus' hubris, see Faber 2007: 428, Michelon 2011: 250–1, Matias 2009: 160–1; for the palace as a reference to Nero's *domus aurea*, see e.g. Smolenaars 1998: 62–3, Unruh 2014: 246–72.
12. Tarrant 1985: on 641–82, Smolenaars 1998: 51–65.
13. Smolenaars 1998: 58, Michelon 2011: 251, with references; Matias 2009: 160–5.
14. See Smolenaars 1998: 59–60, Mader 2000: 154–5.
15. Long and Sedley 1987: 272–304, 359–68; *passim*, Rosenmeyer 1989: 37–112, Inwood 2005: 157–200, 224–48; for a philosophical reading of *natura* in Seneca's *Troades* and *Thyestes*, see Matias 2009.
16. Hine 2004: 173–220.
17. For the prologue of the *Oedipus*, see Degl'Innocenti-Pierini 1990: 290–2, Boyle 2011: 122–31, Trinacty 2014: 138–40, Gardner 2019: 206–13, Martorana: forthcoming.

18. For the flight of the sun as a possible consequence, or response, to horrible crimes within Senecan drama, cf. *HF* 939–42; *Med*. 28–31; *Pha*. 676–9; *Ag*. 295–7; 908–9 – besides *Thy*. 776–88.
19. Matias 2009: 28–41.
20. The Latin text is from the Loeb edition, Fitch 2004, unless otherwise stated; the English translation is also from Fitch 2004, with changes.
21. Matias 2009: 160–1.
22. See Unruh 2014: 248. As noted by Boyle 2017: on 641–82, the initial part of the description is filled with the language of power; for possible allusions to the *domus aurea*, see Faber 2007: 428, with bibliography, also Tarrant 1985: 183, Boyle 2017: on 641–5.
23. Michelon 2011: 243. For *immane* as a marker of the intertextual connection between Atreus' palace and the cave of the Sybil in *Aeneid* 6, see Smolenaars 1998: 56.
24. Cf. e.g. Verg. *G*. 2.141; Ov. *Met*. 8.422; Sen. *Tro*. 566; *TLL* VII 1.439.16–442.3, *s.v.* 'immanis'.
25. Cf. *TLL* VIII 0.24.57–28.9, *s.v.* 'macula'.
26. Bennett 2010.
27. For (constructed and natural) spaces as bearers of ethical meanings, as well as co-actors in emotional responses (particularly within Greek drama), see Martin 2018: 58–76, Mueller 2018: 77–94.
28. For the figurative role of houses as an articulation of human attitudes and morality in the *Thyestes*, and in Seneca's literary production more broadly, see Michelon 2011: 245–7.
29. Alongside this traditional interpretation, Schiesaro's psychoanalytical reading defines the house as 'evocative of the fundamental characteristics of the unconscious' (Schiesaro 2003: 86–7).
30. For the connection between the *penetrale regni* and the place where Procne perpetrates her infanticide in the *Metamorphoses* (cf. *partem … remotam*; *Met*. 6.638), see Tarrant 1985: 185, Boyle 2017: on *Thy*. 650–2.
31. Cf. *TLL* VII. 2.883.45–889.84, *s.v.* 'laetus'.
32. For Tantalus as an overwhelming presence within the *Thyestes*, see Martorana 2022: 269–84.
33. See Roscher, *Lex*. V 75–85, *s.v.* 'Tantalos'; *LIMC* VII 1.839–43; also Boyle 2017: 104–7, Martorana 2022: 276–7.
34. For the presence of divine forces in the *nemus*, see Rimell 2015: 134.
35. These trees were proverbially associated with death: cf. Ov. *Met*. 4.432 (see Fitch 1987: on *HF* 690); also *Oed*. 530–4.
36. Cf. *defendit nemus* ('guards the grove'; *Oed*. 544), with Boyle 2017: on 652–6. On lines 655–6, Tarrant (1985: 185) observes: 'even nature seems to share the Tantalid striving for dominion'.*
37. Latour 2017: 144.
38. Latour 2017: 75–110.
39. 'One thing is certain: the old role of "nature" has to be completely redefined [...] We are gradually forced to *redistribute* entirely what had formerly been called natural and what had been called social or symbolic'; Latour 2017: 120.
40. Cf. the Ghost of Thyestes in *Ag*. 8–9: *hinc auspicari regium capiti decus / mos est Pelasgis* ('here it is custom for Pelasgians to inaugurate the royal crown'); Boyle 2017: on 657–8.
41. After translating *facinus* as 'deeds', Boyle (2017: on 659–64) observes: 'translated thus rather than "crime", which may be implied in this morally neutral term.'*

42. For a possible allusion to Phrygian ancestors (Priam in particular) of the Julio-Claudian dynasty, see Boyle 2017: on 659–64.
43. This definition is inspired by Melissa Mueller and Mario Telò’s analysis of affective objects within Greek drama; see Mueller and Telò 2018: 1–15.
44. Smolenaars 1998: 58. For the pictorial description of the natural landscape within Atreus’ house as a ‘*locus horrendus*‘, see Matias 2009: 161–5. The depiction of the grove as an infernal landscape evokes the motif of boundary violation, which is pervasive in the drama; for landscape violation as a violation of the self in Senecan tragedy, see Segal 2008: 136–56.
45. This vocabulary recalls literary descriptions of the underworld: cf. e.g. *Aen*. 6.268, 323, 438–9; *G*. 4.478–80; *Oed*. 545–7. The adjective *deformis* occurs again twice in this play, at 775 and 832; see Boyle 2017: on *Thy*. 665–7.
46. Generally speaking, the Styx is the quintessential marker of the infernal landscape: for instance, at Sen. *Oed*. 396, the Styx holds a metonymical value of the *pars pro toto*, so that the *populus infernae Stygis* is a way to indicate the broad category of the inhabitants of the underworld. For Tantalus’ *unda*, cf. *Thy*. 5, along with Martorana 2022: 276, 280–1.
47. Line 673 recalls the so-called ‘*maius*-motif’, which has been acknowledged as a programmatic and often metapoetic element within Senecan drama: see Schiesaro 2003: 31; 130–1; Littlewood 2004: 152–4; 234.
48. For the vibrancy of landscape objects, see Cohen 2012: 1–8.
49. Siewers 2014: Chapter 1 (Introduction).
50. A similar flame burns in Lucan’s Massilian grove, also a *locus horridus*: *et non ardentis fulgere incendia silvae* (‘the glare of conflagration came from trees that were not on fire’, 3.420, with Boyle 2017: on *Thy*. 671–5).
51. The expression *superstitio inferum* is a direct reference to the infernal atmosphere that characterizes the *lucus*, which, as observed, is an example of *mundus inversus*, namely the intrusion of the underworld into the upperworld: see Matias 2009: 164–5, also Mader 2000: 160–4. The word *superstitio* defines a violation of religion in other Senecan works: cf. *religio deos colit, superstitio violat* (‘religion worships the gods; superstition violates them‘; *Clem*. 2.5.1); *Ep*. 123.16, with Boyle 2017: on 675–9.
52. For the animation or animalization of the landscape, see Matias 2009: 164.
53. According to Mader (2000: 153–72), this question articulates the transgression of formal boundaries and rhetorical categories, which mirrors the violation of human boundaries that characterizes the episode, and more broadly the tragedy itself. In fact, the idea that horror is inexpressible and tests the limits of language goes back to Greek drama: cf. e.g. Aesch. *Eum.* 34: ἦ δεινὰ λέξαι, δεινὰ δ’ ὀφθαλμοῖς δρακεῖν (‘things truly fearful to speak of, fearful to behold with the eyes’).
54. The conflation between sacrifice and murder is not an innovation of the Senecan version, but was probably an original element of Thyestes’ myth (cf. Aesch. *Ag*. 1590–3). Seneca’s novelty lies in his emphasis on the ritualistic aspects of the murder, which Atreus ultimately performs to satisfy his own anger (cf. 712–14); see Mader 2000: 161, Boyle 2017: on *Thy*. 682–716.
55. Boyle 2017: on 685–90 defines this accumulation of negations as ‘the Messenger’s paradoxical style’.
56. Mader 2000: 160, Schiesaro 2003: 139–76.
57. Thumiger 2023: 57–8.
58. These lines have been read as a (humanized) reaction of the natural world, as well as an expression of cosmic sympathy: see Matias 2009: 166.

59. Cf. the apparition of comets during the assassination of Julius Caesar in Verg. *G.* 1.488; Ov. *Met*. 15.849: *flammiferumque trahens spatioso limite crinem* ('streaking a fiery train on its spacious trail'), with Tarrant 1985: 191, Boyle 2017: on *Thy*. 696–703.
60. Matias 2009: 167; for the connection between Atreus' steadiness and the Stoic *constantia* (cf. *constat* at 704), see Tarrant 1985: 192, Boyle 2017: on *Thy*. 703–6.
61. Cf. also Medea in Sen. *Med*. 863-5. On the Ovidian passage, see Newlands 1997: 194, Rosati 2009: 346.
62. On the philosophical and political implications of this similitude, see Tutrone 2019: 396–7.
63. Unruh 2014: 256.
64. For the moral and cosmic content of the tragedy as an articulation of the *mundus inversus*, see Mader 2000: 154–6.
65. 'The house is not only a symbol of the body and self, but also a symbol of the order of the family and of the kingdom',* Dodson-Robinson 2019: 49; for the *domus Pelopia*, see Tarrant 1985: 45.
66. Cf. e.g. *De Ira* 1.1.4–5, with Martorana (forthcoming); see also Tutrone 2019: 396–7. 'By sacrificing human victims Atreus has collapsed the distinction between animal and human […] Atreus himself becomes beast, man, and god',* (Boyle 2017: on *Thy*. 712–16).
67. For the parallel between these lines and the slaying of Priam in the *Troades* (48–50), see Boyle 2017: on *Thy*. 720–5.
68. According to Tarrant (1985: 194), the direction of the fall denotes Tantalus' 'futile gesture of hostility'.
69. For the macabre components of these lines, see Matias 2009: 168; cf. also Agamemnon's decapitation at *Ag*. 903: *ora cum fremitu iacent* ('his mouth lies there shouting').
70. A parallel can be found in Vergil's description of the sounds of a headless trunk in *Aen*. 9.332–3: *truncum … sanguine singultantem* (with Boyle 2017: on *Thy*. 726–9).
71. For the Homeric reminiscences of this similitude and for the sublimation of Atreus' anger, see Matias 2009: 169; for *ira* as a principal motor of the action within Seneca's dramatic production, see Boyle 2017: on *Thy*. 25–6.
72. The direct invocation of *natura* also underscores Atreus' violation of human and natural boundaries (see Boyle 2017: on *Thy*. 745–6; also Matias 2009: 169–70). For the connection between this question and the following choral ode featuring the collapse of the natural order, see Martorana 2024: 50–3.
73. As Boyle (2017: on *Thy*. 749–54) puts it: 'the paradigm of horror – viewing one's children's corpses deprived of burial – becomes here something "devoutly to be wished" – and especially so in the case of Thyestes, whose children are "buried" inside him'.
74. Atreus' dissection or dismemberment of Thyestes' sons may represent an enactment of the Roman ritual of the *extispicium*, namely the exploration of the entrails of animals: see Boyle 2017: on *Thy*. 755–8.
75. Bennett 2010: 24. Thumiger 2023: 55–9 underlines how certain anatomical approaches to ancient medicine (e.g. Galen's corpus) depict the human body as an ensemble of components, namely an artificial assemblage.
76. 'Assemblages are not governed by any central head: no one materiality or type of material has sufficient competence to determine consistently the trajectory or impact of the group. The effects generated by an assemblage are, rather, emergent properties, emergent in that their ability to make something happen (a newly inflected materialism, a blackout, a hurricane, a

war on terror) is distinct from the sum of the vital force of each materiality considered alone'; Bennett 2010: 24.

77. For this 'violent intrusion' in the human body as a quasi-anatomical dissection, see Thumiger 2023: 58.
78. A few lines later, the Chorus again refer to Phoebus as *parens* (789) or, according to the variant reading, *potens* (see Boyle 2017: on *Thy*. 789).
79. For the metatheatrical implications of this line, see Boyle 2017: on *Thy*. 788. For the connection between line 788 and Tantalus' seminal question at 13, *in quod malum transcribor* ('what evil am I being reassigned to?'), see Martorana 2022: 282.

CHAPTER 9

THE VOCABULARY OF HOMICIDAL HORROR IN LIBANIUS' *AGAINST A MURDERER*

Debbie Felton

Introduction

As others in this volume point out, even though classical literature contained no shortage of horrific elements such as hostile monsters, bloody violence, gory mutilations and gruesome deaths, 'horror' and its subset 'body horror' were not recognized literary genres in the ancient world. Genre in antiquity was based on literary conventions, not content – hence epic poetry, lyric poetry, tragedy, comedy, history, and so on. Rather, as Camilla Asplund Ingemark and Dominic Ingemark point out in their landmark study of fear in the ancient world, these identifiable genres could contain individual episodes intended to evoke the response of fear and its related emotions, such as disgust, loathing and horror.[1] And, lest anyone question whether the ancient Greeks and Romans of two and three thousand years ago felt these emotions in the same way we do now, the Ingemarks' *Representations of Fear* (2020) and other studies of the last decade, such as Donald Lateiner and Dimos Spatharas' *The Ancient Emotion of Disgust* (2017), provide much evidence of such emotional responses. Regarding horror specifically, and its presence in antiquity, we might ask whether the ancients felt this emotion as we do; the answer seems to be a resounding 'yes', given that ancient audiences were prompted to feel negative emotions ranging from grief to disgust to fear. And again, as other chapters have made clear, we generally consider the emotion of horror to be a combination of shock, disgust and fear, with the Latin verb *horrere* referring originally to the physical reaction provoked by these emotions: a trembling or shuddering, often with one's hair standing on end.

One of the earliest examples of a passage intended to evoke disgust and horror appears in the *Odyssey*: Odysseus' encounter with Polyphemus presents a series of emotions that become increasingly negative, culminating in a horror so extreme that the Greek language seems unable to convey it adequately. First, Odysseus expresses curiosity as to the Cyclopes' way of life, and disdain at a culture that strikes him as vastly inferior to the Greeks for its lack of laws, agriculture and shipbuilding. Then, in one of the great foreboding understatements of the epic, Odysseus remarks that the sight of the Polyphemus would not be a 'lovely' or 'welcome' one (ἐρατεινός) for his crew, referring to both the Cyclops' physical appearance and his anthropophagic appetite (9.230). When Polyphemus appears, Odysseus and his men experience intense fear (ἡμεῖς δείσαντες) at the giant's imposing size and strength (9.236). The Cyclops' deep voice, too, and his general 'prodigiousness' or 'monstrousness' (πέλωρον) also provoke a fear response from the humans (δεισάντων, 9.257). What follows is a violent scene worthy of modern body horror cinema with its emphasis on mutilation and gore, as Polyphemus seizes two of Odysseus' companions and smashes them to the ground (9.290–5):

> Their brains seeped out onto the soil and dampened the dirt.
> Then, chopping them limb from limb, he prepared his dinner.
> Just like a mountain lion, he wasted nothing:
> he gulped down guts and flesh and marrow-filled bones.
> Wailing aloud, we raised our hands to Zeus
> as we witnessed these shocking deeds, and helplessness seized our hearts.
>
> ἐκ δ᾽ ἐγκέφαλος χαμάδις ῥέε, δεῦε δὲ γαῖαν.
> τοὺς δὲ διὰ μελεϊστὶ ταμὼν ὡπλίσσατο δόρπον·
> ἤσθιε δ᾽ ὥστε λέων ὀρεσίτροφος, οὐδ᾽ ἀπέλειπεν,
> ἔγκατά τε σάρκας τε καὶ ὀστέα μυελόεντα.
> ἡμεῖς δὲ κλαίοντες ἀνεσχέθομεν Διὶ χεῖρας,
> σχέτλια ἔργ᾽ ὁρόωντες, ἀμηχανίη δ᾽ ἔχε θυμόν.

The gruesome imagery may seem gratuitous to us but is arguably necessary to demonstrate the shocking barbarity of Polyphemus from Odysseus' perspective.[2]

The vocabulary expressing the Greeks' emotional reaction, however, is notable for its apparent inadequacy: Odysseus and his men 'wail' (κλαίοντες) and feel 'helplessness' (ἀμηχανίη). Was δείδω, the usual Greek term encompassing a range of negative emotions such as anxiety, dread and fear, considered insufficient at this point, despite (or perhaps because of) having been used twice previously and for lesser terrors (lines 236 and 257)? Yes, possibly; δείδω and related words such as δειμαίνω ('be afraid/fear') and δεῖμα ('an object of fear') seem to refer mainly to anticipatory dread of future horrors, including possible physical danger, rather than to concretely present horrors such as witnessing one's crewmates' brains being dashed out. Other words, such as δέος (and its related adjective δεινόν) and φόβος may also have been inadequate, both essentially meaning 'dread/fear' and thus being equally anticipatory. As Giulia Maria Chesi says, Homeric language had no word for 'horror': 'Even in what is perhaps one of the most horrific scenes in the entire Homeric *epos* – Polyphemus' anthropophagy in the *Cyclopeia* – we do not find any comparable word to what we call today "horror"'.[3]

Similarly gruesome scenes appear throughout Greek and Roman literature. The *Iliad* provides gory anatomical details of battle-related wounds. Tragedy was famous for having scenes of violence occur offstage: Clytemnestra's murder of Agamemnon in his bath in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, the sparagmos of Pentheus in Euripides' *Bacchae*, the cannibalistic feast in Seneca's *Thyestes*, and other episodes of shocking mutilation and gore were left to the audiences' visual imaginations after being described in extreme verbal detail.[4] Similarly, bodily violations of all sorts were common in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Lucan's *Bellum Civile*, and various other works from Archaic Greece down through the Roman Empire.[5]

The evident appetite for such scenes extended even to non-fiction, including historical and political works.[6] Notably, however, speeches designed for prosecuting murder often shied away from such details, at least in fifth- and fourth-century BCE Athens, and instead stressed the pity deserved by the victims and their families rather than dwelling on bloody murders. This was perhaps out of respect for the families of the deceased. But by the fourth century CE, Greek legal speeches may have been willing to take a somewhat more sensationalist approach not seen previously, as the works of the rhetorician Libanius, for example, seem to suggest. Given that we have a dearth of specific evidence from Athenian and other Greek lawcourts from the 320s BCE on, however, it is difficult to assess what might have contributed to this apparent change.[7] But a close look at Libanius' language, specifically in his common topics exercise *Against a Murderer*, helps illuminate some of the stark differences between classical Athenian homicide cases and the sort of legal rhetoric apparently encouraged in the fourth century CE.

The Greek legal vocabulary of murder

As far as we know, in pre-literary history the ancient Greeks had no official laws. Punishment for crimes of all sorts took the form of retaliation by relatives of the victim. In the case of murder, this probably meant that the victim's family sought out and killed the murderer.[8] This system could lead to endless blood feuds, however, such as the one that nearly gets out of hand at the end of the *Odyssey*. Odysseus returns from the Trojan War to his kingdom of Ithaca, only to find that during his twenty-year absence an obnoxious crowd of more than one hundred suitors has been harassing his wife, threatening his son, Telemachus, and making themselves at home in his palace. He and Telemachus slaughter the lot of them. But word of the massacre spreads quickly, and the families of the slain suitors furiously demand that the killings be avenged (24.426–35). Without Athena's intervention, many more men, including Odysseus and Telemachus, would have been massacred.

To avoid just this sort of blood feud, in the seventh century BCE the Greeks began to establish communal laws. As Hyde notes, the Greek conception of homicide, which developed after Homer's time, 'was based on the idea that where a murder had been committed, not only was it a crime against the gods and men, but that also a pollution had been brought upon the community', and the only way such defilement could be removed was 'by the proper punishment of the murderer'.*[9] Regarding homicide law specifically, the most complete information we have comes from Athens where, around 620 BCE, the politician Draco produced the first known written Athenian law code, one which established various penalties for different crimes, including homicide. These laws recognized the presence or absence of basic intent: a homicide was either intentional or unintentional. Not yet developed was any sense of degree of intent; there was no recognition of premeditation or, more technically, 'malice aforethought', for example, which currently distinguishes murder from manslaughter in various US penal codes. Rather, one of the main purposes of Draco's homicide laws was to assert the state's jurisdiction over homicide and so to suppress the retaliatory killings by victims' families, though the families were still consulted regarding the manner of punishment.[10]

But the Athenians also recognized different circumstances even for intentional and unintentional homicide, and in the years following the initial institution and later modification of Draco's law code they developed five specialized homicide courts.[11] Of these five, the Areopagus tried the most serious cases, those involving a defendant charged with φόνος ἑκούσιος, 'voluntary killing', of an Athenian citizen, usually indicating premeditation. Conviction on this charge generally resulted in a mandatory death sentence. The Palladion oversaw cases of φόνος ἀκούσιος, 'involuntary homicide', which the Athenians recognized as far less criminal than those of intentional slaying and consequently as meriting a lighter punishment: exile without confiscation of property.[12] The Delphinion tried cases of φόνος δίκαιος, homicide considered justifiable according to the law. This included, for example, accidentally killing someone during an athletic competition; accidentally killing companions in battle; killing a thief or highwayman in self-defence; and killing a man caught in bed with one's wife, mother, sister or daughter. In these cases, the penalty depended on the intent of the defendant and the status of the victim. The Phreatto tried very specific cases, those involving a defendant who while already in exile for a previous crime was accused of homicide, and the Prytaneion held homicide trials in which the killer remained unknown – but also trials for non-human killers, including animals and (most oddly to modern audiences) inanimate objects such as roof tiles.

Despite formally recognizing different types of homicide, and despite taking into account one's intent or state of mind during the commission of a homicide, by the fifth century BCE the Greeks still lacked the vocabulary to describe nuanced differences. Aside from the three phrases above (φόνος ἑκούσιος, φόνος ἀκούσιος, and φόνος δίκαιος), they had no equivalent to what in the United States is called 'first-degree murder' in contrast to 'manslaughter', for example, though the former involves premeditation, and the latter is often involuntary. They also had nothing comparable to various types of second-degree murder, such as those involving 'extreme indifference to human life', or those known as 'felony murder'.[13] The most general Greek noun for 'killing' was φόνος, while more specifically and frequently ἀνδροφόνος – an adjective meaning 'man-killing' – was the technical legal term used as a noun to indicate a homicide: it denoted a person who kills a fellow human. ('Homicide' itself is the Latin-derived English noun literally meaning 'the killing of another person' or 'man-killing.') The term κακοῦργος indicated a general 'evildoer' and described criminals of all types, especially thieves, though by the fourth century BCE the term was also used specifically of murderers. Additionally, the Greeks sometimes employed the word σφαγεύς, which could mean 'murderer', but which more frequently occurred in the stronger sense of 'butcher' or 'cutthroat' because of its regular use to describe religious animal sacrifices in which the animal's throat was ritually cut. That is, σφαγεύς appeared consistently in the context of ritual animal slaughter for sacrifices to the gods (especially in tragedy), as did the related verb σφαγιάζω, which indicated the slaying of a sacrificial animal victim. On the rare occasion that σφαγεύς appears in a legal case or political speech, it seems especially intended to elicit a horrified reaction.[14]

Ancient Greek murder trials

Although we know a lot about the different homicide courts, we have surprisingly few historical cases of homicide surviving from ancient Athens. Despite the dearth of extant material, it would be a mistake to conclude that homicide was rare; if that were the case, the Athenians would hardly have established five different courts for dealing with this type of crime.[15] Most of what does survive, which comes from the fifth and fourth centuries BCE, consists of speeches for the defence rather than the prosecution, and as such tend largely to pass over the physical violence of which the defendant is accused.[16] Consequently, we find little in the way of horror, as the defence speeches appeal to the court's sense of justice and try to evoke pity for the defendants. Our few remaining prosecutorial speeches, however, also suggest a limited appetite for expository detailing of murder, at least when the cases are non-political in nature.[17]

For example, Lysias 1, more commonly known as *On the Killing of Eratosthenes*, dating to the late fifth century BCE, was written as a defence speech for Euphiletus, who is on trial for the killing (φόνος) of Eratosthenes, the man he caught committing adultery with his wife. This would have been justifiable homicide according to Athenian law of the time, but the dead man's relatives brought Euphiletus to trial on the grounds that he had entrapped Eratosthenes, thereby demonstrating premeditation. The case was tried before the Delphinion, but regarding the killing itself, Euphiletus (via Lysias) understandably presents no details other than to say that he delivered a blow to Eratosthenes and tied his hands. He then states that, despite the man's plea not to be killed and his willingness to pay financial compensation (which was the usually accepted option), 'I took the vengeance which you regarded as most just when you imposed it on those who pursue such actions' (ταύτην ἔλαβον τὴν δίκην, ἣν ὑμεῖς δικαιοτάτην εἶναι ἡγησάμενοι τοῖς τὰ τοιαῦτα ἐπιτηδεύουσιν ἐτάξατε; 1.29) – thus euphemistically glossing over the killing itself. If Euphiletus had disposed of Eratosthenes by, say, stabbing him repeatedly, there was no need to remind the court of that brutal detail.[18]

Still, even prosecution speeches from this period avoided sensational details. Antiphon 1, or *Against a Stepmother*, generally dated to between 419 and 414 BCE, presents the case of a woman charged with premeditatively poisoning her husband, with the prosecutor being the man's son by his first wife. The speech includes no details about the man's death, saying simply that he 'fell into an illness from which he perished on the twentieth day' and 'died violently' (εἰς νόσον ἐμπίπτει, ἐξ ἧς καὶ ἀπώλετο εἰκοσταῖος … βιαίως ἀπέθανε, 1.20, 26). The prosecution's main argument is that the dead man is more deserving of pity than the defendant, who claims that it was an accidental overdose of a love potion (a typical argument for a woman accused of poisoning a man).[19]

Admittedly, we have only a very small sampling of such rhetoric upon which to draw,[20] but legal speeches of the fifth and fourth centuries BCE generally demonstrate a focus on evoking sympathy and a sense of indignity – in the cases above, for and toward Euphiletus, and for and toward the poisoned husband – without aiming to horrify the courts with lurid descriptions of the state of the bodies, a tactic that, particularly when the specific victims are known/named, might be seen as dishonouring the deceased and upsetting their families. Antiphon's speech, designed to elicit pity for the victim, nevertheless does not even dwell on what the victim must have suffered during the three-week illness that preceded his death by poison. We have very little to draw from in Greek in between the fourth centuries BCE and CE, but we know that, though changes occurred in other laws, the Athenians were 'singularly conservative' regarding their homicide laws and preserved then almost entirely intact, considering them inviolable – with the result that, hundreds of years later, Draco's homicide laws remained largely unchanged, apart from some minor modifications by Solon.[21] Similarly, the Areopagus, as the only court that oversaw cases of clearly unlawful, intentional homicide, was still trying murder cases as late as the second century CE.[22] The Athenians considered premeditated murder to be the worst offence known to the law.

Consequently, Athenian homicide law was widely used in Greek cities even under the Roman Empire. Roman law regarding murder was rather different from Greek law, being less nuanced, though it began to be established around the same time. According to tradition, Rome's second king, Numa Pompilius (r. 715–673 BCE) was the first Roman ruler to enact a law prohibiting murder, though this seems to have been more out of self-preservation than general concern; kings preferred to control the power to kill, allotting it to themselves but limiting or prohibiting it for others. So, Numa and his successors had the jurisdiction to try and to punish offenders in cases of homicide, distinguishing between intentional and unintentional killing.[23] During the Roman Republic, however, murder was not a legally defined crime, even though the Twelve Tables (*c.* 450 BCE) tangentially incorporated laws on certain types of justifiable and unjustifiable homicide, such as the legality of killing a thief caught in the act on one's property. Poisoning, too, was illegal, as was kin-killing (*parricidium*). But, in the absence of homicide laws during much of the Republic, Romans generally resorted to the type of familial blood feuds that the Greeks had avoided by the establishment of such laws. Only on rare occasions, such as the killing of a high-ranking official, did the Roman government bother to become involved. Moreover, regarding legal provisions around murder during the Roman Empire, it seems that until the time of Hadrian (r. 117–138 CE) no one 'bothered to say anything official'.*[24] According to Marcian, Hadrian wrote in a rescript – a Roman emperor's written reply to appeal for guidance on a legal point – that, 'he who kills a man, if he committed this act without the intention of causing death, could be acquitted; and he who did not kill a man but wounded him with the intention of killing ought to be found guilty of homicide' (*Institutes* 14, *Digest* 48.8.1.3).[25] Still, while the Romans were sorting out their attitudes toward homicide, free Greek cities under the Empire, like Antioch in the East, continued to use the traditional homicide laws established hundreds of years earlier in Athens. We see this tradition reflected in rhetorical exercises composed by Libanius.

The vocabulary of horror in Libanius' *Against a Murderer*

As Craig Gibson explains, Libanius (314–*c.* 393 CE) 'is one of the best known and best documented public figures of the later Roman Empire'.*[26] Born in Antioch, a Greek city with a mixed pagan and Christian population, at age fifteen he decided to pursue a career in rhetoric, studying with various teachers in his home town until, at twenty-two, he went to study in Athens for four years. Finding the instruction and students there less than satisfactory, he returned to Asia Minor, ultimately spending the last four decades of his life back in Antioch. Gibson notes that Libanius was so prolific a writer that his speeches and letters were 'rivalled only by the writings of Cicero for their sheer volume', but that he was 'above all a teacher of rhetoric'.*[27]

Libanius' teachings included *progymnasmata*, 'exercises preliminary to' the practice of declamation.[28] Such exercises were typically assigned to students of rhetoric as training for composing speeches, and like other teachers of rhetoric Libanius assigned 'common topics' as part of his *progymnasmata* to teach students logical and rhetorical skills. Typical common topics exercises asked students to argue for or against a plaintiff or defendant; they might be asked to prosecute an acknowledged (though fictional) criminal such as an adulterer, thief, traitor, or murderer. The 'murderer' was a standard figure in rhetorical handbooks, and a fictional defendant, like one in real life, might even demonstrate two criminal elements, such as 'murderous thief'.*[29] Libanius wrote five common topics exercises for his pupils to study, and they all take the following form: a brief introduction, followed by an argument from the opposite of the act; then, an exposition of the act, including a discussion of the subject's state of mind, a 'vivid description' of the act, and an assessment of its results; next, an argument from comparison to other acts; an argument from the subject's previous acts; criticism of the subject's thinking; rejection of pity for the subject; and, lastly, a reminder of the act and/or an exhortation to the jurors.[30]

In Libanius' common topics exercise *Against a Murderer* (κατὰ ἀνδροφόνου), in this case a robber who murders his victims, we find intentional efforts to evoke not just the usual anger but also horror at the defendant's transgressive acts rather than simply pity for his victims and their families. Although the murderer in the speech is fictional – as were the contents of all such exercises – Libanius probably modelled him after real murderers, because otherwise the exercise would not have been especially useful for the students. In reality, the figure known as the 'highway robber' was a legitimate danger to people venturing outside the boundaries of their villages and cities.[31] Also, early in the speech, in the section on argument from the opposite of the act, Libanius provides information on ancient Greek homicide laws, evincing an attitude that hearkens back to ancient Athens: homicide laws (τῶν νόμων τῶν φονικῶν) are much more exact (ἀκριβέστερον) than all other laws because, of all crimes, homicide is considered the most terrible (τὸ δεινότατον).[32] The laws consider a murderer 'terrible and hateful to the gods' (δεινὸν καὶ θεοῖς ἐχθρόν; Libanius 1.2).[33] Despite the passing of a millennium since Homeric epic and Greek tragedy, by the fourth century CE δεινόν and its forms were apparently still the default terms to convey horror.

Thus far, Libanius has delineated the usual legal considerations. But in his exposition of the act, he describes the accused murderer, referred to by the usual legal term ἀνδροφόνος, in the following contrasting terms:

> This man alone of all of us has stood in opposition to the laws and, regarding them as being in reality idle chatter and empty words, has made his own right hand more authoritative than our divinely-ordained laws, donning the proper demeanour but exercising wicked intentions (γνώμῃ πονηρᾷ χρησάμενος) and adopting a character contrary to appearances; in our midst, mild (πρᾶος), but in deserted places, harsh (ἀπηνής); in word, humane (φιλάνθρωπος), but in action, most savage (ὠμότατος); in the marketplace, self-controlled (μέτριος), but outside the walls, like a wild beast (θηριώδης). Taking up his position in a lofty and precipitous spot, he observes travellers from afar, and he hides his victims, taking the night as his accomplice in this audacious act (τὸ τόλμημα συνεργόν).
>
> *Libanius 1.7–8*[34]

Both the vocabulary and the actions described paint the murderer as a savage, inhuman beast who stalks his prey. Libanius hints at what we would probably consider to be sociopathy, the mental disorder in which a person lacks a sense of moral responsibility or social conscience, and which is characterized by a lack of empathy or remorse. Sociopaths excel at mimicking what we might call 'neurotypical' behaviour, and this would explain why the murderous robber in this speech can exhibit 'the proper demeanour' and behave appropriately when among the townspeople but turn into a methodical killer when outside the city's boundary.[35]

Immediately after this, Libanius continues with details of the murders:

> One man was hurrying to get to his village and was killed (ἀπώλλυτο). Another was returning to the city and perished (διεφθείρετο). Someone else went in pursuit of a runaway slave and was murdered (ἀπεσφάττετο). It is easy for a man who has prepared himself to kill someone who is unprotected (ἀφύλακτον) … Casting aside all human reasoning, he thrusts his sword without mercy.
>
> *Libanius 1.8–9*[36]

This passage indicates that the accused is a multiple murderer,[37] and the choice of passive rather than active verbs would seem to emphasize the victims' helplessness – reinforced by ἀφύλακτον – rather than the killer's actions, were it not for a rhetorical increase in the strength of the Greek words used for 'kill'. The first verb, ἀπώλλυτο (ἀπόλλυμι) is one of the more general words for 'destroy' or 'kill'. The next, διεφθείρετο, while also a general term for 'kill' or 'perish', can contain an intimation of increased brutality,[38] while ἀπεσφάττετο more specifically and most often refers to throat-slitting, a meaning reasonably inferred here given the killer's short sword (Libanius 1.7–9).[39] In fact, ἀποσφάττω is the verb Libanius typically employs in his common topics for cutting down people with a weapon (e.g. 2.14, 4.15, 5.4; cf. 4.14), at least in a negative sense; when the killing is considered admirable, such as with tyrannicide, Libanius uses the more general ἀποκτείνω (e.g. 4.6).[40] Meanwhile, describing a tyrannicide 'cutting the [tyrant's] throat', Libanius eschews ἀποσφάττω in favour of ἀποτέμνων … τὸν τράχηλον (5.7) – more anatomically specific but also more dispassionate in its technicality.[41]

Libanius then focuses on the killer's τόλμημα, a word often used in prosecution speeches of all sorts to indicate the negative trait of 'audacity', restating it as 'he felt no shame' (οὔτε ᾐσχυνετο) for 'polluting' (ἔμιανε) the night with these murders (τοῖς φόνοις), the sun for having to shine on the bodies (τοῖς σώμασιν), and the earth for receiving the corpses (τοὺς νεκρούς) (1.9). The cluster of descriptions here drives home not only the multiple murders and growing body count but the resultant moral and physical *miasma* that surrounds the murderer and infects his community. Libanius continues this sort of crescendo with a recriminating aside to the murderer, providing details explaining the exceedingly transgressive nature of the man's crimes: 'You were in the habit of striking down suppliants (ἱκετεύοντας ἔπαιες) and slaughtering those who beseeched you (δεομένους ἀπέσφαττες) and cutting to pieces those who grovelled at your feet (προκυλινδουμένους κατέκοπτες)' (Libanius 1.10).[42] In this sentence, Libanius moves from the general to the specific and describes the killings in ritual terms. He first says the victims were 'beseeching' or 'begging' (ἱκετεύοντας, δεομένους), with the former a Greek word usually associated with religious supplication, especially when praying to a deity. The word for 'grovelling', too, (προκυλινδουμένους) – in the sense of being on one's knees and begging for favour – more usually occurs in a religious context. And the word 'slaughter' (ἀπέσφαττες), used earlier in the exposition, is now followed by 'cut up' (κατέκοπτες).

In contrast, Libanius uses a much shorter, less emotionally charged version of these concepts at common topics 5.6–7, *For a Tyrannicide* (ὑπὲρ τυραννοκτόνου): when the 'noble, courageous friend to the People' (ὁ δὲ γενναῖος οὑτοσὶ καὶ δημοτικὸς καὶ εὔψυχος) arms himself and attacks the tyrant's guards, he 'cut down' (κατέκοπτε) one, chased off some, and threatened others, all in quick succession. Libanius gives us no sense that this man was pausing to mutilate any of his opponents, in contrast to 1.10. Rather, the verb here most likely has the same sense, both literally and idiomatically, as the English 'cut down', and in a military sense not remotely present in 1.10. Also, when about to be killed, the tyrant simply 'fell to his knees and begged' (πεσὼν εἰς γόνυ ἱκέτευε). The curt nature of these passages suggests that, when seeing a homicide as a positive act – in that it will save many other people from suffering and dying under a tyrant – Libanius reduces (or deliberately avoids) the detailed vocabulary that would evoke a response of horror from the audience, since they are supposed to cheer the tyrannicide rather than be repulsed by him.

Such specific wording accomplishes several things. First, by using language associated with suppliants, Libanius equates the killer with a god, stressing the murderer's *hubris* in deciding who lives and who dies while they pray to him for mercy. Next, Libanius reinforces this perception by using religious language that configures the killings as a kind of ritual, as if the victims were being sacrificed. Moreover, the extended description of the murderer as ignoring his victims' pleas and cutting up his victims indicates a level of torture and mutilation considered extremely unusual for highway robbers in antiquity: many brigands in the ancient world did not find it necessary to kill their victims, and those who did kill them usually did so swiftly. But Libanius indicates that this murderer delayed killing his victims, instead listening to them plead for their lives, which perhaps even gave them false hope that he might let them go – an especially sadistic tactic. Then he not only killed them but apparently also chopped them up, though Libanius' phrasing leaves unclear the specific extent to which the bodies were dismembered. The horror evoked by this sentence stems from the killer's moral and physical transgressions, culminating in body mutilation.

Another aspect of the crimes that would have horrified the audience was that the killer deliberately hid his victim's bodies. Continuing his exposition, Libanius says that 'the most terrible part of the disaster (δεινότατον τῆς συμφορᾶς) was that the majority of those who died could not even be taken up for burial' – both because most victims' bodies had been hidden and because, after some victims had been found, people were too afraid to go outside the city gates to search for others, as there was a fear (φόβος) of being killed themselves (Libanius 1.12).[43] Libanius concludes his exposition by pointing out that 'The most terrible thing of all (τὸ πάντων δεινότατον) is that, while he was committing such crimes in the wilderness, he went and associated with us and made us unwilling accomplices (ἀγνοοῦντας κοινωνοὺς) in his bloody, disgusting acts' (τῶν αὑτοῦ μιασμάτων (Libanius 1.14).[44] The reference to 'accomplices' hearkens back to the opening of Libanius' exposition, where, discussing traditional homicide laws, he noted that, 'They regarded the murderer as so terrible and hateful to the gods that even if someone were to enter under the same roof with a man who had committed this crime [homicide], he was considered an accomplice (κοινωνὸς) in the wrongdoing'.[45] Regarding Libanius' repetition of the superlative δεινότατον, the first instance (δεινότατον τῆς συμφορᾶς) lacks the article, indicating that we could translate it in an absolute sense, such as 'an especially terrible aspect of the disaster', while the second instance (τὸ πάντων δεινότατον), which includes the article and thus constitutes the relative use of the superlative,[46] would seem to be Libanius' main point: the overall stain on the community. Moreover, Gibson may have felt compelled to take liberties with his translation, given that μίασμα, while clearly indicating the moral guilt or stain that results from bloodshed (especially murder) does not mean anything quite so specific as 'bloody' and/or 'disgusting', though this phrasing does get its point across, and may have been necessitated by the dearth of sufficient Greek vocabulary of horror, as indicated yet again by the default to forms of δεινόν.[47] Notably, Libanius mentions robbery only in passing (1.9); certainly, it is the far lesser crime here, and Libanius closes out his speech with a vivid summary driving home the horror of the defendant's actions:

> Imagine yourself at the murder scene (ἐπὶ τῶν φονικῶν). Picture this man standing over his victim with a sword,[48] and the person he caught is supplicating you, calling to mind the gods, nature, the laws, the courts – but picture this man considering all these things to be nonsense, and slaughtering and destroying (ἀποσφάττοντα καὶ διαφθείροντα) and not bending in response to lamentation.
>
> *Libanius 1.31*[49]

Conclusion

Libanius' practice speech κατὰ ἀνδροφόνου, a fictional prosecution of a highway robber who also savagely murders his victims, provides a view into application of homicide law in the Greek East under the Roman Empire, as Libanius studied in Athens but spent most of his life in his home town of Antioch in Asia Minor. As an exercise in common topics intended to provide students practice with invective, the speech also includes vivid descriptions of the alleged crimes and appeals to the emotions of dread and horror to a greater extent than elsewhere in Libanius. This murderer indulges in an exaggerated type of overkill, one more akin to the Cyclops' treatment of Odysseus' men than to, say, the insidious poisoning described in Libanius 3 (featuring an 'angel of death'-type doctor) or even the abuse of authority exhibited by the tyrant of common topics 4.

Given the dearth of surviving Greek prosecution speeches for cases of homicide, whether such cases are historical, rhetorically fictional, or even mythological, we should certainly hesitate to claim any definitive logical conclusions regarding the Greek vocabulary of horror in murder trials. Other *progymnasmata* from antiquity shed little light on the question, because, unlike Libanius, they provide no templates for homicide cases but rather mention prosecution of such cases only in passing. Aphthonius the Sophist, a student of Libanius in Antioch, wrote a speech opposing a law requiring the killing of an adulterer when caught in the act,[50] but says very little about murder other than in comparison with tyranny, which he considers the greater evil.[51] Earlier, Aelius Theon and Hermogenes (first and second centuries CE, respectively), used the example of 'murderer' to illustrate certain points of rhetoric. For instance, Aelius suggests that to create vividness of expression, one should describe the crime and the suffering of the victim:

> In denouncing a murderer we shall vividly describe what kind of person committed the murder (τὸν φόνον), how brutally and without mercy, by his own hand, when he, though a man, set on another human being, drawing his sword and striking a blow, and if the blow happened not to be fatal, inflicting one after the other, and how he was polluted with the blood of the murdered man, and what cries the latter uttered, begging his assailant for mercy and calling for help, now to men, now to the gods, and other such things.*[52]

Aelius' paragraph, while nowhere near as detailed as Libanius' *Against a Murderer*, certainly gives the impression that Libanius followed the earlier rhetorician's advice about vividness. Hermogenes suggests that in a *topos* about a temple-robber this type of criminal should be characterized via the trope of comparison as 'more dangerous than murderers, the difference can be seen by comparing the victims: murderers attack human beings, he has abused the gods in his drunkenness'.*[53]

In short, despite the paucity of prosecution speeches on homicide, we can at least present some concluding observations regarding perceived differences between such speeches as written in classical Athens and as written by Libanius in Antioch in the form of rhetorical exercises several hundred years later. First, we do seem to see a limited number of common and undifferentiated terms to express dread, horror, and dreadful/terrible things. Even the term for fear, φόβος, shows up surprisingly infrequently. Rather, to elicit the desired emotional response and preferred judicial penalty, the orator turns to body horror, though still in far less detail than found in Homeric epic, in Greek tragedy, or in Greek literary fiction in the early centuries CE. Second, the very existence of such a practice speech as Libanius' *Against a Murderer* probably reflects a real-life concern about highway robbery and murder across the Roman Empire. Highwaymen existed in ancient Greece, certainly, but the vast Roman conquest of territory, and the roads they built to traverse it, saw a proportional increase in this type of crime – though, again, the multiple murders by one man working alone outside the city were evidently quite unusual even for this milieu. Finally, as Darryl Jones notes, one of the functions of horror is 'to shock us out of our complacency'* and make us desire punishments for transgressions.[54] Libanius dwells on mutilation murder to shock his audience into a realization of exactly how brutal and transgressive this man's actions are. In Libanius' rhetoric, homicide was the worst of all possible crimes, and this man's methods of murder were the worst of all homicides.

Notes

1. As, for example, Aristotle's reception theory of catharsis focuses on the emotional effect of a work on the audience, not on the teller; Ingemark and Ingemark 2020: 59.
2. Translations are mine except where otherwise noted. Also likely intended to evoke horror via disgust are the later lines describing what Polyphemus belches up while he sleeps: φάρυγος δ᾽ ἐξέσσυτο οἶνος / ψωμοὶ τ᾽ ἀνδρόμεοι ('from his gullet burst forth wine / and gobbets of man flesh', 9.373–4).
3. Chapter 2 in this volume.
4. On the cannibalism in *Thyestes*, see Martorana, Chapter 8 in this volume; for other scenes of gore, see Chesi and Most, Chapters 3 and 4 in this volume, respectively. As in Homeric epic, in Greek tragedy δεινόν was often the go-to word for generally horrific scenes. For example, in the prologue of Aeschylus' *Eumenides*, the priestess of Apollo describes the sight of the sleeping Furies as δεινὰ λέξαι, δεινὰ δ᾽… δρακεῖν ('horrible to speak of, horrible to gaze upon'; l. 34).
5. On bodily violations in the *Metamorphoses*, see Estèves, Chapter 7 in this volume. For a succinct overview of horror in ancient literature, see Joshi 2017.
6. For an example, see Häberle, Chapter 5 in this volume.
7. Greek legal systems changed rather a lot during the Hellenistic period (323–146 BCE), largely due to shifts in social and political structures after the death of Alexander the Great. The resultant Hellenistic kingdoms and extensive mixing of various nationalities across the Mediterranean and Near East 'resulted in an analogous multitude of legal systems that prevented the unity of law',* with justice often being delivered by people's courts and touring judges known as *periodeuontes* (see Panezi 2021). On the other hand, by Libanius' time, the sort of hyperbolic, gruesome descriptions found first in Greek tragedy and later in Roman tragedy and epic (such as Lucan's *Bellum Civile*) started making their way into Latin prose, such as the lurid episodes occasionally found in Tacitus, Suetonius, Apuleius, and others, as well as in the Greek novels.
8. Phillips 2008: 29.
9. Hyde 1918: 325–6.

10. Phillips 2008: 29.
11. Information here adapted from Phillips 2008: 59–60. The exact types of cases and number of jurors varied over time.
12. Hyde 1918: 338. The Palladion also tried cases of defendants charged with killing non-citizens (such as resident aliens, strangers and slaves), regardless of intent.
13. 'Felony murder' refers to murder committed during the commission of a felony (such as arson, burglary, DUI, kidnapping, rape, or vandalism). Laws defining 'second-degree murder' vary by state; for more information, see *Justia*.
14. See Carawan 1998, and cf. Demosthenes 13.32. σφαγή, a much stronger word than φόνος, appears only infrequently in relation to the killing of men, and when it does, usually denotes either mass murders (massacres) or murders of unusual brutality (McDevitt 1970: 504–5).
15. Cf. Gagarin 2003.
16. Even Antiphon's *Tetralogies*, artificial exercises illustrating different types of argument in homicide cases, mention the (fictional) killings without details, as they tend toward logic and factual/admissible evidence toward proving guilt or innocence rather than arguing from emotion; Gagarin 2011: 17; cf. 18–27. They also stress the concept of community pollution.
17. Such as Aeschines 1; see note below.
18. John Porter has suggested that we might need to regard Lysias 1 not as a speech ever actually delivered in court but as 'a particularly sophisticated form of practical rhetorical exercise – a fictional speech based on a fictional case',* designed principally to instruct pupils of rhetoric, and perhaps to advertise the logographer's skill (2007: 82). Porter adduces many points in support of this argument (2007: 88), not least of which are the brevity of the speech compared to others in which the death penalty was on the table and the fact that Euphiletus calls only two defence witnesses (2007: 74, 79). If Porter is correct, Lysias 1 has much in common with Libanius' common topics exercises, discussed below.
19. Cf. Ogden 2009: 102–4, Eidinow 2016: 34–7, noting also that even in cases where *pharmaka* (drugs/poisons) result in death, the crime is referred to as a φόνος or homicide, not a poisoning (43). The third surviving murder trial from fifth-century Athens, Antiphon 5, *On the Murder of Herodes* (*c.* 419 BCE), consists of the orator's defence speech. Herodes (an Athenian citizen) had disappeared during a sea voyage, and the prosecution alleged that the defendant, Helos (a foreigner), had killed Herodes and thrown his body overboard. Helos was charged as a κακοῦργος rather than as an ἀνδροφόνος (5.9), and this in itself comprised a main point of the defence speech, inasmuch as the prosecution 'had decided not to bring a straightforward indictment of murder against him' given the absence of material evidence and witnesses (Freeman 1963: 63). This is what we now call the principle of *corpus delicti* ('body of the crime'), referring to concrete evidence such as a corpse, but more broadly to the need for any evidence whatsoever that a crime has actually been committed.
20. Otherwise, we have only passing references to murder cases for which we have no records. One such reference appears in Aeschines 1, *Against Timarchus* (346 BCE), in reference to the brutal murder of Nicodemus of Aphidna, saying that the victim's eyes and tongue were cut out (ἐκκοπεὶς ὁ δείλαιος ἀμφοτέρους τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς καὶ τὴν γλῶτταν ἐκτμηθείς, 1.172). Because Nicodemus had supported Meidias and Eubulus, enemies of Demosthenes, Meidias tried (unsuccessfully) to pin the murder on Demosthenes.
21. Hyde 1918: 328–9.
22. Hyde 1918: 354.
23. Gaughan 2010: 9–11.
24. Southon 2021: 67.

25. Watson 1998: 333. Southon humorously adds that Hadrian thus 'invented attempted murder for the first time in Roman history, for which he's really not given enough credit'* (2021: 67).
26. Gibson 2008: xvii.
27. Gibson 2008: xviii.
28. Gibson 2008: xx.
29. Gibson 2008: 141.
30. Gibson 2008: 141–3.
31. See, for example, Casson 1974: 315–16, and cf. Theseus' encounters with the six highway robbers on his journey from Troezen to Athens (Felton 2021: 101–21).
32. As Gibson notes, Libanius' remarks echo the homicide law of Draco 'as given in Demosthenes 20.158' (2008: 145, n. 3).
33. Gibson 2008: 145. All translations of Libanius are from Gibson.
34. Gibson 2008: 147.
35. Felton 2021: 55, arguing that Libanius' robber-murderer bears the hallmarks of a serial killer.
36. Gibson 2008: 147.
37. On this, see Felton 2021: 54–7.
38. An example of general use: Libanius in this same speech describes 'the delight of the spectators' at a festival being 'destroyed' (διεφθείρετο) by the announcement of a murder (1.11).
39. Gibson 2008: 147–9.
40. ἀποκτείνω also appears with reference to a doctor who killed people with poison (ἀπεκτονότα … φαρμάκῳ, 3.1; cf. 3.14).
41. In terms of the weapon, ξίφος, the Greek short sword, is used for hacking in close quarters, and the verb ὤθει, while possibly connoting a sense of urgency, just has the general meaning of 'push/shove/thrust'.
42. Gibson 2008: 147.
43. Gibson 2008: 149.
44. Gibson 2008: 149.
45. Gibson 2008: 145, and 145, n. 6 on Demosthenes as a source for this information.
46. Smyth [1920] 1984: 282.
47. Gibson's translation may hearken back to the *Progymnasmata* of Aelius Theon where, in his section on *topos*, Aelius describes a murderer as 'polluted with the blood of the murdered man' (μιαινόμενος αἵματι τῷ φονευομενῷ); see Kennedy 2003: 45, Camerarius 1541: 74; see also below.
48. The word 'victim' is not given, but rather implied in ἐφεστηκότα.
49. Gibson 2008: 157.
50. See Kennedy 2003: 124–7.
51. Kennedy 2003: 107.
52. Kennedy 2003: 45.
53. Kennedy 2003: 80. The *Progymnasmata* of Nicolaus the Sophist (fifth century CE) mention only that murderers may be used in common-topics (see Kennedy 2003: 147–54).
54. Jones 2014: xii.

CHAPTER 10

AT THE BORDERS OF HORROR AND SCIENCE: THE SOCIAL CONTEXTS OF ROMAN DISSECTION

Claire Bubb

Medical horror is a vibrant subgenre: the perversion of trusted healer into hideous monster can take many turns, and it taps into deep-seated fears of vulnerability.[1] Dissection in particular lives uneasily at this boundary between trust and terror. Though now a standard element of medical education, the dissection of humans has a long and chequered history. State-condoned human dissections in Europe, which began in the early fourteenth century, relied on executed criminals to furnish the subjects of their anatomical study.[2] Indeed, in the mid-eighteenth century post-mortem dissection was considered so horrific that it was legally imposed in England as a punishment more severe than mere execution.[3] Notoriously, this restricted pool of anatomical subjects led to grave robbery and even outright murder, such as the real-life horror tale of Burke and Hare, the nineteenth-century serial killers who murdered sixteen people and sold them as subjects for the anatomy lectures at the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh before being caught.[4] Horror fiction has consistently mined these tropes, from Dr Frankenstein's classic resurrectionist experiments to Dr Moreau's trans-species vivisections. Indeed, vivisection bleeds seamlessly into the theme of the sadistic surgeon, a staple of the genre.[5]

This chapter explores the resonance of these classic horror themes in the ancient Roman world. In classical antiquity human dissection was a risqué practice, rarely confessed to; indeed, the mere idea was considered a disquieting desecration. Yet the study of anatomy was a flourishing and competitive part of the contemporary medical world. Doctors circumvented the reluctance to dissect humans by instead dissecting and vivisecting animals, relying on anatomical homologies to offer insight by proxy into the mysterious workings of human viscera. Further, these dissections were both public and publicly oriented, drawing fascinated crowds. Some part of their fascination undoubtedly stemmed from the spectacles' potential for horror, and the ancient doctors were cognizant of the need to stay firmly on the healer side of the healer/horror boundary. I will trace the contours of this boundary and the delicate balance Roman dissectors struck between underscoring the homologies between animals and humans and maintaining their audience's emotional distance from their writhing, shrieking subjects.

No one could argue that the Romans, as a society, were squeamish. They were comfortable with – indeed, delighted by – a wide range of grisly activities, featuring the torment, disembowelling and dismemberment of various people in various ways and places. Rome was first and foremost a military power, and, even for those not on active campaign, the violence of war pervades Roman literature and art. Nor was peacetime entertainment entirely peaceful. The events in the arena were both brutal and beloved: animals and humans died there in a variety of unpleasant and invasive ways, all to the cheers of the crowds who thronged to watch.[6] The legal system offered further possibilities for horrific entertainment outside of the arena and the army. Torture was an ever-present possibility in court cases, where the testimony of the enslaved was to be doubted on principle unless obtained under duress.[7] Some who fell foul of the law and were unlucky in the courts could receive punishments both nasty and public.[8] While the victims of all this judicial violence would have been, almost without exception, drawn from the lower levels of Roman society – the enslaved and those whose social status as *humiliores* would not have protected them from physical and capital punishment – corporeal violence was not limited exclusively to the lower classes. The Roman Forum periodically displayed the decapitated heads and severed hands of the politically disgraced, left to rot in gruesome warning.[9] On its northern corner, the *Scalae Gemoniae* were a notorious site for the exposure of the corpses of the high-ranking condemned after execution; they were left vulnerable to depredations by the crowd before eventually being impaled with a hook and dragged to the Tiber for ignominious disposal.[10]

All this ambient carnage, while often entertaining in its own way to its observers, also raised deeply unsettling possibilities. Romans were profoundly disquieted by the idea of their own or their loved ones' bodies being opened – of themselves somehow slipping from cheering observers to violated victims. Studies of arena violence have highlighted the spectacles' social and psychological underpinnings: the spectators' experience was undergirded by the power dynamics at play in the empire, and the drama was heightened by the complicated social constructs that made some victims and others spectators.[11] Anxiety about slippage between these boundaries similarly provides fodder for narrative drama: protagonists of the ancient novels often find their bodies inappropriately imperilled, whether through threat of juridical torture or through some other loss of their normally protective status.[12] Maud Gleason has convincingly argued that these fears would have coloured any observation of the public dissection of animals; that an awareness of the permeability of social boundaries, and concomitant potential for personal vulnerability, raised the stakes on any contemplation of bodies being opened, human or otherwise.[13]

In addition to these very real possibilities of corporeal violence and rupture that life in the Roman world threatened, more superstitious fears also fed on these same anxieties. Witches – and their sinister need to harvest human body parts for their magic – loomed large in the public imagination.[14] Two particularly resonant examples will serve to set the background here: Lucan's Erictho and the witches who attack Apuleius' Telyphron. Erictho is the ultimate example of the necromantic witch, a recurrent figure in the genre of horror.[15] In keeping with her necromantic proclivities, she takes an unsavoury interest in corpses. Lucan describes her ghoulish harvesting of *materia magica*: she gouges out the eyes of the dead in their graves with her fingers, gnaws the nails from dead hands, robs gallows of their corpses, scrapes and wrenches human remains from crucifixes, and rivals the wolves for the flesh of the exposed.[16] These travesties of dissection reach their pitch with an emotive inversion of familial love: in the midst of a funeral, when the body of the 'dearly' deceased expects to be met with kisses, Erictho instead uses her teeth to tear away its face and tongue in the very midst of its family.[17]

The highly personalized element of the threats that witches pose to the bodies of loved ones comes to the fore in Apuleius' horror-comedy tale of Telyphron.[18] First, there is the widow who feels the need to hire Telyphron to guard the corpse of her husband from the depredations of Thessalian witches before his burial: she feels compelled to take steps to prevent precisely the same sort of desecration that Erictho perpetrated.[19] Then, of course, there is the ill-starred Telyphron himself, who unwittingly turns from guard to harvested body during the course of his vigil. The witches put him to sleep and, mistaking him for the unluckily homonymous corpse, magically summon him to the door, where they cut off first his nose and then his ears, replacing them with waxen replicas. Apuleius makes a joke of Telyphron's horror and shame upon discovering the mutilation of his body and renders the sincerity of the widow's concern for her husband's corpse somewhat suspect by the revelation that she was the one who killed him in the first place. However, the narrative success of the story hinges on the fact that it is easy to relish horrific stories of witches and their mutilating ways in the abstract, but it all ceases to be humorous when it happens to you. Indeed, the fascination of watching or imagining someone else experience something that would be terrifying to experience for oneself is precisely where the edgy appeal of horror lies. In short – and as explored in more detail elsewhere in this volume – the loss of one's own corporeal integrity, whether while alive or while dead, was a spectre that haunted the ancient psyche from the *Iliad* onwards.

So strong was this aversion to personal corporeal rupture that even in medical contexts, when a body was being opened to beneficial ends, the idea remained unsettling. Several early Christian texts describe emotional reactions to surgeries, which – for a variety of reasons, ranging from the need to maximize natural light, the utility of having multiple hands to restrain unanaesthetized patients, and even the desire to advertise surgical skill – could be performed outdoors under the public gaze. John Chrysostom describes these events and their effects on the onlookers:

> in the case of doctors, when they incise or cauterize or in some other way cut open (*lit.* dissect) a maimed or weakened part, and when they cut off a limb, many men stand around the patient and the doctor doing these things … And then it is possible to see the skin being cut and the bodily fluid flowing and the putrefaction being disturbed and to endure much unpleasantness springing from this spectacle and much pain and distress, not just from the sight of the trauma, but also from the agony of the one being cauterized and cut. For no one is so stone hearted that, standing beside those suffering such things and hearing them crying aloud, he does not lament and feel troubled and experience great distress in his soul.
>
> ἐπὶ τῶν ἰατρῶν, ἐπειδὰν τέμνωσιν, ἢ καίωσιν, ἢ καὶ ἄλλῳ τρόπῳ πεπηρωμένον καὶ ἐξησθενηκότα ἀνατέμνωνται, καὶ κατατέμνωσι μέλος, πολλοὶ περιστοιχίζονται τόν τε ἄῤῥωστον καὶ τὸν ταῦτα ποιοῦντα ἰατρὸν … κἀκεῖ μὲν καὶ δέρμα ἔστιν ἰδεῖν τεμνόμενον, καὶ ἰχῶρα ῥέοντα, καὶ σηπεδόνα κινουμένην, καὶ πολλὴν ἀηδίαν ἀπὸ

> τῆς θεωρίας ἐγγινομένην ὑπομεῖναι, καὶ πολλὴν ὀδύνην καὶ λύπην, οὐκ ἀπὸ τῆς ὄψεως τῶν τραυμάτων μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀπὸ τῆς ἀλγηδόνος τῶν καιομένων καὶ τῶν τεμνομένων· οὐδεὶς γὰρ οὕτω λίθινος, ὡς παρεστὼς τοῖς ταῦτα πάσχουσι, καὶ ἀκούων ὀλολυζόντων, οὐχὶ κατακλᾶται, καὶ συγχεῖται, καὶ πολλὴν τῇ ψυχῇ δέχεται τὴν ἀθυμίαν.[20]

Here, rather than a criminal or traitor – someone it is easy to other and root against – the onlooker is faced with a helpless victim and blameless sufferer. When personal empathy is allowed to take root, an audience that might delight in a punitive evisceration in the arena is rendered suddenly vulnerable and distressed: there but for the whims of chance go I.

Indeed, another pseudonymous treatise suggests that, rather than an advertisement, such events were a deterrent. It, too describes, the gruesome spectacle of public surgeries, but attributes to them a benevolent purpose:

> Whenever wise doctors are going to cut off a festering limb or extract stones embedded in orifices or correct any other natural faults, they do not take the sufferer into a secluded spot to do this, but, having set him up in the middle of the agora, and having encircled the spectacle with bystanders, they thus make the cut. They do this not because they wish to display human misfortunes, but rather in order to teach those observing others' bodies how much care they should take of their own health.
>
> οἱ σοφοὶ τῶν ἰατρῶν, ὅταν σεσηπότα μέλλωσι τέμνειν μέλη, ἢ λίθους τοῖς πόροις ἐναπεσφηνωμένους ἐξέλκειν, ἢ ἄλλο τι τῆς φύσεως ἁμάρτημα διορθοῦν, οὐκ εἰς γωνίαν λαβόντες τὸν κάμνοντα τοῦτο ποιοῦσιν, ἀλλ' ἐν μέσαις αὐτὸν προθέντες ταῖς ἀγοραῖς, καὶ θέατρον ἐκ τῶν παριόντων περιστήσαντες, οὕτως ἐπάγουσι τὴν τομήν. ποιοῦσι δὲ τοῦτο, οὐχὶ τὰς ἀνθρωπίνας ἐκπομπεύειν βουλόμενοι συμφορὰς, ἀλλὰ τοὺς ὁρῶντας ἐν ἀλλοτρίοις παιδεύοντες σώμασι, πολλὴν τῆς οἰκείας ὑγείας ποιεῖσθαι τὴν πρόνοιαν.[21]

He adds that these doctors can attain similarly wholesome effects even just through 'the display of their manifold instruments'.[22] The mere sight of a scalpel, in short, with all its unpleasant connotations, was sufficient to terrify.

Indeed, unlike these altruistic doctors, whom the Christian authors conjured up to stand in parallel to Christ the spiritual healer, Roman doctors were likely more annoyed than not at their patients' understandable reticence to put themselves under the knife.[23] In the world before antisepsis, surgery was a risky undertaking. Even patients who avoided infection could not be guaranteed positive outcomes. Galen describes various untoward surgical mishaps, ranging from cripplingly severed nerves to fatally severed arteries.[24] It is thus not surprising that even the comparatively minor incision required for the very common practice of bloodletting met with some resistance. Galen recounts, with evident frustration, patients who refuse phlebotomy due to 'cowardice'.[25] Indeed, opponents of the practice claim that it can evoke such terror that patients are liable to 'die from fear, some before the vein is even cut, others never recovering after the cut is made'.[26]

All told, when not pleasantly othered by the clear us/them framing of the arena, the cutting open of bodies was, for many Romans, the stuff of horror.

Dissection and especially vivisection had their own particular role to play in this discomfort. Human vivisection appears in the catalogue of unthinkable events that play out in the major declamations attributed to Quintilian. In these exercises, young men gloried in the melodramatic, exercising their nascent oratorical abilities in the defence or critique of highly improbable and morally ambiguous scenarios. Among murderous stepmothers, machinating pirates, walking ghosts, reluctant cannibals, and incestuous sons, there is a case about ailing twins. These twins were afflicted with what appeared to be the same grievous illness. Most of the doctors on the case gave up hope and declared it terminal, but one proposed to find a cure for one boy by vivisecting the other. The father accepted this macabre solution; one son was saved at the expense of the other; and the grieving mother took the father to court on charges of murder. The declamation, which takes the part of the mother's attorney, lingers on the unthinkability of vivisection, something 'which no one ought to try'.[27] The vivisection itself is framed in a way evocative of torture: the boy is stripped naked and stretched along the bed. Then, the advocate tells us, the doctor, a 'butcher' with 'ruffian hands', 'slicing lightly and bit by bit, suspended [the boy's] soul on the border of life and death, spinning out his pain', and the wretched boy endured, while

> his vital organs were repeatedly pulled out, handled, and drawn apart: the hands did more than the knife. The father stood beside the doctor, gaping as the viscera were opened; he urged the doctor not to hurry as he agitated the oozing seat of the boy's soul with gory hands …
>
> egesta saepe vitalia, pertractata, diducta sunt; fecerunt manus plura quam ferrum. stat iuxta medicum pater apertis visceribus inhians; stillantem animae sedem cruentis manibus agitantem ne festinet, hortatur …[28]

The speech ends with the mother's affecting farewell: she fears that her son's soul is not at peace, but that it flits about 'excluded and wandering, a shade to be feared among the astonished and horrified dead, even amidst the legendary punishments, because of its mangling'.[29] Nevertheless, she does her best to put his body to rest: she 'fill[s] the empty chest with the cold and discarded viscera, join[s] scattered limbs in an embrace [and] assemble[s] severed body parts'.[30] One could easily be forgiven for assuming this was a necromantic episode in Lucan or the finale of a bloody Senecan tragedy, not the conclusion of a purported court case. The slow, tortuous pace of the operation, the mesmerized complicity of the father, the outraged helplessness of the mother: all combine to make a scene worthy to be the climax of any horror tale. Human vivisection is a lurid topic wherever it is found.

This declamatory take on the issue offers a personalized and sensationalized spin on what was a larger moral debate in scientific circles. While no doctors actually advocated for the vivisection of dying clients, Celsus reveals that the question of human vivisection was a favourite flashpoint in debates of medical ethics. Famously, the physicians

Herophilus and Erasistratus of third-century BCE Alexandria had obtained permission from the Ptolemies to dissect and even vivisect condemned prisoners.[31] Although human subjects were not subsequently the norm, the reliance of these foundational anatomical authorities on these instances of cruelty was a subject of some angst in the medical community. Detractors claimed that vivisection is a 'crime' and that 'it is cruel to cut into the abdomen and chest of living men and cruel for the art that presides over human health to cause not just the death of a man, but the most terrible (*atrocissimam*) type of death'; further, they claimed that the process is not only cruel but useless, since the very act of cutting open the body changes what is inside, rendering anatomical research futile.[32] The defenders, however, affirmed the utility of the practice and asserted that 'it is not cruel to seek remedies for the innocent people of all future time in the punishment of guilty men (and only a few of them at that)'.[33] Ultimately, which side of this debate any given Roman doctor fell on was a likely indicator of their sectarian affiliations: followers of the Empiricist or Methodist schools of thought would mostly have turned their noses up at dissection in all its guises, while the rest would generally have supported both reliance on the controversially obtained wisdom of the Hellenistic authorities and also the use of animal dissection to further the modern study of anatomy.[34]

Indeed, by the end of the first century CE and throughout the second, the dissection of animals constituted a particularly visible aspect of the activities of certain medical circles.[35] Galen is a vocal example of this trend. He reveals that public animal dissections were a popular means of medical self-advertisement in his time. In his student days, he trained extensively across the Mediterranean with teachers who performed animal dissections and vivisections. He mentions that one of his fellow students in Smyrna, who was about to return home after his studies to set up practice, planned to mark his debut as a fully fledged doctor by performing vivisections demonstrating the motion of the lungs and thorax. Though confident in his anatomical abilities, the young man was apparently not a gifted orator, and Galen mentions him in order to explain that, as a favour, he wrote out some material for his friend to use in fashioning a speech to accompany his dissections.[36] While this unnamed friend was amazing provincial audiences with his anatomical demonstrations, Galen brought a similar set of performances to Rome. His debut on the medical scene in the city was marked by a series of vivisections on the thorax of the pig. Indeed, even before the success of his medical practice began to bring him to the attention of influential names, his reputation as a skilled dissector had already made his name well-known. In his semi-autobiographical work, *On Prognosis*, he describes his first really spectacular medical success in the city: his unexpected cure of the philosopher Eudemus.[37] The delighted Eudemus praises Galen to all and sundry, including the politically influential consular Flavius Boethus. Boethus, though, it turns out, had already heard of Galen, not because of his medical expertise, but because he had learned that he was 'trained to the highest degree in anatomical theory'.[38] He had accordingly already invited him to give a private performance of his vivisectory demonstrations. Galen describes this set of demonstrations, which he performed repeatedly, in some detail, providing instructions for how to do them in his text *On Anatomical Procedures*. We can thus form a very clear picture of what they would have been like.

The one – of several – that I take as an example here describes a vivisection related to the intercostal nerves, which run between the ribs and control the contraction of the muscles there that result in the expansion and relaxation of the rib cage and, thus, the inhalation and exhalation of air through the lungs and, consequently, the production of sound. Galen sets out to prove by this display the – at his time disputed – claim that the brain, via the nerves, controls the production of the voice. By compressing these nerves, he is able to arrest phonation and silence the animal. Galen conceives of this demonstration in a highly performative way. He includes different instructions depending on whether the anatomist is 'examining alone for himself' or demonstrating for a crowd: if for a crowd, timing is everything.[39] In these performative cases, he opens up the thorax of the animal in advance, slips threads around all of the nerves without pulling them tight, and recommends that it is helpful to have 'several assistants on hand' so that the threads can be cinched as instantaneously as possible when the moment is right.[40] After giving an introductory lecture, in which he lays out the physiology at stake and stokes up audience anticipation, he can then proceed: he strikes the pig, making it squeal as loudly as possible, and then signals his assistants to tighten the slip knots and compress the nerves. The animal immediately becomes mute, though its motions do not change. Galen reports that this 'astounds the spectators' and that they find it 'amazing'.[41] Not content with this, however, he proceeds to make them 'still more amazed', by quickly loosening the threads, allowing the animal to regain its voice just as suddenly as it lost it.[42] Essentially, Galen has cut open an animal and discovered the mute button for its voice. To an audience in a time before mute buttons, this would have been a mind-blowing, almost magical feat.

Though in Galen's case clearly successful, this entire endeavour was a potential minefield. First, while being amazing is wonderful, being too amazing can be problematic: doctors of Galen's ilk found it vitally important to distance themselves from accusations of sorcery. In the very same text where he introduces his demonstrations for Boethus, Galen addresses the dangers of this boundary line. He explains that a doctor too skilled in the prognostication of the course of diseases risks 'appearing to be a kind of sorcerer'; in other words, the awe that skill inspires can be double edged.[43] Though he does not link dissection itself to sorcery, others did, with weighty consequences. Apuleius reveals that the dissection of animals formed a significant element in the case against him when he was on trial for performing magic. Though he explains that, inspired by his study of Aristotelian biology, he practiced dissection to intellectual ends, exploring the anatomy of unusual fish in order to add to Aristotle's collection of such data, his prosecutors framed his dissection of fish as a sinister, magical practice.[44] Apuleius mocks his accusers as ignorant, superstitious, maliciously intentioned buffoons, but their suspicions were not entirely without foundation. Roman magic incorporated animal components with some regularity.[45] Amidst his litanies of medical folk remedies, Pliny also describes the magical uses to which animal innards were put. He reports a truth charm, for example, that featured some vivisection: the practitioner must 'extract the tongue of a living frog with no other part of the body adhering to it' and place it over the heart of the allegedly deceitful woman while she sleeps.[46] Then there is the magical charm against quartan fevers, which requires that a mouse must suffer a fate similar to Apuleius' Telyphron: its ears and snout are snipped from it while still alive and added to a potpourri of other similar animal products.[47] All told, as Apuleius learned to his detriment, if not presented in the right way, an anatomical demonstration like the one Galen describes might start to flirt with problematically magical and witchy associations.

Another distinct – though not completely unrelated – problem faced the dissector and especially the vivisector. Romans were generally perfectly happy to watch animals, and even humans, being killed, but, as I explored earlier in this chapter, there was still an important boundary at play: anything too immediately evocative of *personal* experience of rupture was distressing. Here animal vivisections could potentially pose a problem. It was an essential element of these demonstrations that the animals stand in convincingly for humans; indeed, the whole point of the dissections was to draw parallel conclusions about the anatomical and physiological situation in people, based on that in the animals, and thus demonstrate that the dissector was in a superior position to understand and cure human ailments. Tight homology is the crucial underpinning of comparative anatomy. However, as we have seen, the mental superimposition of one's own body onto the one under the knife had the potential to be unsettling.[48] It was not in the best interest of these doctors for their audiences to empathize or identify too closely with their anatomical subjects.[49] In other words, doctors found themselves here walking on that fine line where horror lives – the border zone between the fascinating and the terrifying.

Further compounding this problem, there were some unfortunate stories abroad. Though human dissection had left its authorized, publicly countenanced days in the past, it was nevertheless not a completely unheard-of activity.[50] Galen reports that some doctors had the opportunity to briefly examine the viscera of fallen enemies during the course of the war in Germania.[51] He further mentions that others took the opportunity to poke around in the ravaged bodies of those condemned to beasts in the arena, while still others engaged in the particularly unpleasant practice of dissecting dead babies who had been abandoned and exposed, precisely in order to prove that human and animal organs are basically the same in their arrangements.[52] Galen is scrupulous about leaving these somewhat suspect actors anonymous and safely distancing them from his own unimpeachable activities. All three categories of bodies here – German enemies, condemned criminals and unwanted infants – were socially liminal and their desecration thus more condonable, but, still, the ghoulish spectre of Erictho dissecting bodies in the cemetery would not have been too far in the background. Doctors had to be extremely careful not to veer too close to these realms of horror and magic. As the stewards of the living body, they had a reputation to defend: it was already hard enough to get skittish patients to submit to their scalpels without a suspicion of unsavoury practices and ulterior motives hanging over their heads.

The most successful performers learned to walk as close to this line as they could without stepping over. Galen several times mentions one of Rome's medical superstars from the generation before him. This Quintus was apparently a memorable character. Galen describes him as 'the best doctor of his generation' and one of 'the famous doctors of our time', and he seems to have attained his reputation purely on the merits of his medical skill, not through any social finesse.[53] His students were full of fond reminiscences of his bawdy jokes and memorable escapades, including one occasion when he showed up at the bedside of a particularly wealthy and powerful patient in the early morning unapologetically stinking of wine from the previous night's debauches and rebuffed the patient's protests with a rude remark.[54] All in all, Quintus appears to have been a larger-than-life figure, and his anatomical feats very probably enhanced his persona. The only specific instance that Galen relates is his memorable vivisection of the testicles of a goat:

> I have heard it said of Quintus that he was accustomed to carry out [the dissection of the testicles] on a living he-goat, which he supported upright so that in this position it was similar to a man.[55]

Galen goes on to point out that there is no practical reason for this approach: dissecting a live, or even a dead, goat on its back would provide an equally close proxy for human anatomy. What Quintus appears to have been going for was, rather, a performative edge. The similarity of the genitals of the upright goat to those of a naked man would have been immediately titillating and somewhat unsettling, especially given that the goat would have to have been forced into the position by binding its limbs to boards not unlike crucifixes. Quintus – whose naughty jokes were compelling enough to be memorialized through the millennia – would surely have put a ribald spin on the patter he produced to accompany his dissection.[56] I suspect that he would have intentionally leaned into the potential for discomfort that men in the audience would be feeling at witnessing testicular slicing by proxy, evoking a fascinated horror and then dispelling it with humour. With the right spin, the audience might cringe and groan as the procedure unfolded, while stopping short of feeling any true compassion. This combination of raunch and science, with a frisson of the horrific, would no doubt have been a crowd-pleaser. Indeed, it has often been remarked that horror and humour are intimately, though counterintuitively, connected emotions.[57] Quintus, not unlike Apuleius in his novel, could play on these inherent affinities in order to both entice a larger audience and simultaneously mitigate the disturbing overtones of his work: he might thus avoid any ghoulish associations for himself by intentionally leaning towards a 'Telyphronic' rather than 'Ericthonic' spectacle.

Galen himself also experimented with these boundaries. As a young man, fresh from his studies, he returned home to Pergamon to take up the medical profession as a doctor in his own right. Like his companion from Smyrna, he hit the ground running, performing anatomical demonstrations, likely including some version of the thoracic demonstrations he did for Boethus. Probably the most memorable of his public appearances in this period was his participation in a medical competition, which he describes in some detail:

> I attended a public gathering where men had met to test the knowledge of physicians. I performed many anatomical demonstrations before the spectators; I made an incision in the abdomen of a monkey and exposed its intestines: then I called upon the physicians who were present to replace them back (in position)

> and to make the necessary abdominal sutures – but none of them dared to do this. We ourselves then treated the monkey, displaying our skill, manual training, and dexterity. Furthermore, we deliberately severed many large veins, thus allowing the blood to run freely, and called upon the Elders of the physicians to provide treatment, but they had nothing to offer. We then provided treatment, making it clear to the intellectuals who were present that (physicians) who possess skills like mine should be in charge of the wounded.[58]

Galen's vivisection of this monkey took his peers aback. From the surrounding descriptions, it seems that this gathering had been intended as a purely rhetorical affair. The venerable, established physicians participating had probably been expecting to hold forth, in staid and respectable declamatory style, with speeches on medical puzzles and hypothetical questions of treatment. Instead, the young upstart smuggled in a monkey and presented his competitors with its writhing, screaming body, bleeding and disembowelled. Though we must imagine that these men, who were, after all, experienced doctors, had seen their fair share of gore and were perfectly capable of performing sutures on their human patients, they appear to have been completely appalled and nonplussed by the spectacle that he thrust in their faces.

Galen, it would seem, would later come to repent of these youthful tactics. In the text that contains the directions for the thoracic dissections we examined above, which was written a few decades later in his career, he repeatedly cautions his readers against attempting the vivisection of monkeys. In Book 8, he explains that the vivisection of a monkey is 'a hideous spectacle'; in Book 9, he again cautions that vivisections of the brain should be performed on 'either a pig or a goat, in order to … avoid seeing the unpleasing expression of the monkey when it is being vivisected'; in Book 11, he again issues the same advice, warning that the facial expression of a monkey while being vivisected is 'loathsome' and telling his readers to 'leave the live monkeys alone'.[59] Even for a person like Galen, who routinely participated in scenes of blood, pain and agony, there was something uniquely disquieting about simian suffering: the homologies here were too close. In another, more publicly oriented text, *On the Usefulness of the Parts*, Galen often refers to the monkey as a comical caricature of the human form. He alludes to Pindar's line on the perpetual beauty of monkeys to children and asserts that

> this animal is an amusing toy for children at play: for it attempts to mimic all of man's actions but fails at them in a comic way.
>
> ἔστιν ἄθυρμα γελοῖον παιζόντων παίδων τοῦτο τὸ ζῷον. ἁπάσας μὲν γὰρ τὰς ἀνθρωπείους πράξεις ἐπιχειρεῖ μιμεῖσθαι, σφάλλεται δ' ἐν αὐταῖς ἐπὶ τὸ γελοῖον.[60]

Throughout this text he refers to the simian body as comical, precisely because it is 'a laughable caricature of the human body'; indeed, it is the small imperfections of the otherwise striking homologies between the two species that lead to the hilarity of watching a monkey 'attempting to play the flute and to dance and to write and to do each of the things that men do in the proper way'.[61] This emotional impact is perverted in scenes of vivisection, perhaps explaining the overwhelmed reaction of the ambushed doctors in Pergamon. In the inverse of Quintus' turn from the horrific to the comedic in his dissection of the goat, the monkey's transfiguration from ridiculous caricature to hideous embodiment of pain was far too close to home: these vivisections slipped over the edge from science into horror.

In short, dissection was a potent tool for doctors looking to impress, in part precisely because of its potential for horror. The Roman fascination with the disembowelment of others, combined with their deep-seated fear at the idea of themselves or their loved ones being cut open, would have combined to add a thrilling element to the spectacle of animal dissection. Quintus and Galen both seem to have experimented with these boundaries in their vivisections, attempting to strike a balance in their audiences' reaction. They demonstrated a command of bodies – both animal and, implicitly, human – that appeared marvellous, while stopping just shy of suspect and supernatural. They performed feats that were mesmerizingly bloody, but consciously and carefully manipulated the delicate emotional balance required in order to keep their animal subjects humorous or othered, rather than horrific.

Notes

1. For a survey of the genre, see Kremmel 2018.
2. The earliest recorded academic dissections of humans in Europe were those conducted around 1316 in Bologna by Mondino de' Liuzzi, who describes his subjects as beheaded and hanged. For overviews of the history of medieval and Renaissance dissection, see Siraisi 1990: 78–97 and Nutton 2022: 245–77 respectively.
3. The 'Murder Act' of 1751 (25 Geo 2 c.37: *An Act for Better Preventing the Horrid Crime of Murder*) was designed so that 'some further terror and peculiar mark of infamy be added to the punishment of death' (§1) with the expectation that it would 'impress a just horror in the mind of the offender' (§3); see Sawday 1995: 54–84.
4. For the story of Burke and Hare in full, see Gordon 2009. On the phenomenon more broadly, see MacDonald 2006.
5. On surgical horror specifically, see Aldana Reyes 2014: 144–65.
6. Augustine, *Confessions* 6.7–8 (11–13) evocatively describes the horrific appeal of the spectacles; cf. 10.35 (55).
7. Syrkou 2021 offers a gruesome catalogue of the types of torture available in antiquity.
8. Particularly unpleasant examples include the staged executions in the arena and roadside crucifixion; see Coleman 1990 and Cook 2014, respectively.
9. See Hope 2000 for a discussion of the various fates of bodies post-mortem and their psychological impact on the living.
10. For the *Scalae Gemoniae* specifically, see Barry 2008.
11. See, for example, Barton 1993, Plass 1995, Coleman 1997, Fagan 2011.
12. For example, Achilles Tatius' *Leucippe and Clitophon* includes the threatened juridical torture of the male protagonist (7.12), while Xenophon of Ephesus' *Ephesian Tale* sees him actually tortured (2.6); Apuleius' *Golden Ass* has Lucius undergo many indignities (albeit as an

animal), including near disembowelment (6.31) and participation in a forced execution in the arena (10.24).

13. Gleason 2009.
14. On the witch in the Roman imaginary, see Ogden 2001: 139–48, Gardner 2014, the essays in Stratton and Kalleres 2014 (especially Spaeth 2014 and Stratton 2014), Felton 2016, Watson 2019: 167–202.
15. For the endurance of the trope into modern times, see Hutton 2017, Creed 2022.
16. Lucan, *De bello civili* (*BC*) 6.541–53. For an analysis of the entire Erictho episode and its relationship to other literary and medical attitudes towards dissection, see Goyette 2021: 116–26.
17. Lucan, *BC* VI.563–8 (*caris*).
18. On the psychology of the subgenre of horror-comedy generally, see Carroll 1999. For an analysis of the role of horror, particularly that surrounding witches, in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, see Gardner 2014.
19. Apuleius, *Met.* II.21–30.
20. John Chrysostom, *PG* 51.55.
21. [John Chrysostom], *PG* 63.565.
22. [John Chrysostom], *PG* 63.655 (τὴν τῶν ποικίλων ἐργαλείων ἐπίδειξιν).
23. See Goyette 2021: 104–10 for a strand of distinctively negative attitudes towards surgery in the Latin literature, particularly Scribonius Largus and Pliny the Elder.
24. Galen reports on various other doctors' surgeries which resulted in cripplingly severed or damaged nerves at *De anatomicis administrationibus* (*AA*) 3.9 (2.395–6K = Garofalo 1986–2000: 187–9) and *De locis affectis* 1.6, 4.7 (8.55, 256K); he explains how he intervened to save a patient whose doctor had mistakenly phlebotomized an artery at *De methodo medendi* (*MM*) 5.7 (10.334–5K); he describes another doctor who managed to avert disaster from his accidental and near-fatal severing of an artery only to see the patient die from gangrene at *AA* 7.13 (2.634K = Garofalo 1986–2000: 461).
25. Galen, *MM* 9.4 (10.615K) (δειλίᾳ); 9.5 (10.620K) (δειλίαν); *De sanitate tuenda* (*San. Tu.*) 4.4 (6.257K) (δειλίαν).
26. Galen, *De venae sectione adversus Erasistratum* 2 (11.151K) (δείσας τις ἔθανεν, ὁ μὲν καὶ πρὸ τοῦ τμηθῆναι τὸ ἀγγεῖον, ὁ δὲ καὶ τμηθεὶς οὐκ ἀνεκομίσθη).
27. [Quintilian], *Dec.Maj.* 8.4 (*quod deberet nemo experiri*).
28. [Quintilian], *Dec.Maj.* 8.19 (*grassaturas manus … carnifex; leviter paulatimque discindens animam in confinio mortis ac vitae librato dolore suspenderet*).
29. [Quintilian], *Dec.Maj.* 8.22 (*exclusus ac vagus et inter fabulosa supplicia metuendus adhuc laceratione per stupentes horrentesque manes umbra discurris*).
30. [Quintilian], *Dec.Maj.* 8.22 (*vacuum pectus frigidis abiectisque visceribus rursus implevi, sparsos artus amplexibus iunxi, membra diducta conposui*).
31. von Staden 1989: 138–53, 187–90 collects and evaluates the textual evidence for Herophilus and Erasistratus' work on humans.
32. Celsus, *DM* Pr. 40 (*scelere; crudele, uiuorum hominum aluum atque praecordia incidi, et salutis humanae praesidem artem non solum pestem alicui, sed hanc etiam atrocissimam inferre*).
33. Celsus, *DM* Pr. 26 (*neque esse crudele … hominum nocentium et horum quoque paucorum suppliciis remedia populis innocentibus saeculorum omnium quaeri*).

34. On Empiricist and Methodist attitudes to dissection, see Bubb 2022: 267–71.
35. For a fuller picture of the popularity and visibility of dissection in the Roman period, see Bubb 2022: 54–90, 216–73; for the distinctly competitive and public-facing role that these dissections played in Rome's medical circles, see Salas 2020, especially 56–102.
36. Galen, *AA* 1.1 (2.217K = Garofalo 1986–2000: 3); *De libris propriis* 2.5 (19.17K = Boudon-Millot 2007: 141).
37. Galen, *De praenotione ad Epigenem* (*Praen.*) 2.1–3.17 (14.605–19K = Nutton 1979: 74–88).
38. Galen, *Praen.* 2.25 (14.612K = Nutton 1979: 80) (εἰς ἄκρον ἠσκῆσθαί με τὴν ἀνατομικὴν θεωρίαν).
39. Galen, *AA* 8.4 (2.669K = Garofalo 1986–2000: 503) (μόνος ἐπὶ σαυτοῦ ποτ᾽ ἐξετάζῃς).
40. Galen, *AA* 8.4 (2.669K = Garofalo 1986–2000: 505) (πλείονες οἱ ὑπηρετούμενοί σοι).
41. Galen, *AA* 8.4 (2.669K = Garofalo 1986–2000: 505) (τοὺς θεατὰς ἐκπλήττει· θαυμαστὸν γὰρ εἶναι δοκεῖ).
42. Galen, *AA* 8.4 (2.669K = Garofalo 1986–2000: 505) (μᾶλλον οἱ θεαταὶ θαυμάζουσι).
43. Galen, *Praen.* 1.6 (14.601K = Nutton 1979, 70) (καὶ γόης τις εἶναι δόξειεν). Indeed, the English word 'awful' originally conveyed precisely this admixture of reverential wonder and fear.
44. Apuleius, *Apol.* 33–40.
45. For an overview of animals in magic, see Ogden 2014, Watson 2019.
46. Pliny, *NH* 32.18 (49) (*extrahat ranae viventi linguam, nulla alia corporis parte adhaerente*).
47. Pliny, *NH* 30.30 (99).
48. Indeed, while Romans typically watched the slaughter of animals in the arena with enthusiasm, a notable exception to this tolerance occurred at the games to celebrate the opening of Pompey's theatre in 55 BCE, where empathy for the plight of elephants being slaughtered was roused by their perceivedly anthropomorphic behaviour. Cicero, *Fam.* 7.1.3 explains that the audience felt 'compassion' (*misericordia*) for the animals, who appeared to entreat the crowd for mercy, because they had 'a kinship to the human race' (*cum genere humano societatem*); cf. Pliny, *NH* 8.7 (21–2) and Dio 39.38 for more description of the emotional reaction of the audience.
49. Petit 2018, 153–61 explores Galen's determined avoidance of an 'esthétique de l'horreur' in his writing about surgery and dissection, in favour of a clinical and emotionlessly scientific style designed to forestall this sort of empathetic horror.
50. On the prevalence and acceptability of human dissection in the Roman period, see Bubb 2022: 110–18, including a discussion of the dissenting view of Dean-Jones 2018, who argues that human dissection was more mainstream in that period than scholars typically allow.
51. Galen, *AA* 3.5 (2.385K = Garofalo 1986–2000: 177).
52. Galen, *AA* 3.5 (2.385–6K = Garofalo 1986–2000: 177).
53. Galen, *Praen.* 1.9 (14.602K = Nutton 1979: 70) (βελτίων μὲν ὢν ἰατρὸς τῶν καθ᾽ ἑαυτόν); *In Hippocratis De natura hominis* 1.27 (15.68K = Mewaldt et al. 1914: 36) (τῶν καθ᾽ ἡμᾶς ἐνδόξων ἰατρῶν Κόιντος).
54. Galen, *In Hippocratis Epidemiarum librum VI* 4.10 (17b.151K = Wenkebach and Pfaff 1956: 206–7; cf. Vagelpohl 2022: 634–7).
55. Galen, *AA* 12.7 (155 Simon); translation from the Arabic by Duckworth, Lyons and Towers 1962: 124.

56. Galen, at *San. Tu.* 3.13 (6.228K), goes out of his way to pass along Quintus' *bon mot* about the appeal of anointing in massage: 'it makes the clothing come off' (ἀφανίζειν τὰ ἱμάτια).
57. See Carroll 1999 for an analysis of this connection and a survey of various authors' and directors' recognition of their affinity, including the horror director Stuart Gordon's comment, 'you'll never find an audience that wants to laugh more than a horror audience'* (146).
58. Galen, *De optimo medico cognoscendo* 9.6 (Iskandar 1988: 105); translation from the Arabic by Iskandar.
59. Galen, *AA* 8.8 (2.690K = Garofalo 1986–2000: 531) (εἰδεχθές … τὸ θέαμα), 9.2, 11.4 (18, 107, 109 Simon); translation, lightly edited, from the Arabic by Duckworth, Lyons and Towers 1962: 124.
60. Galen, *De usu partium* (*UP*) 1.22 (3.80K = 1.58 Helmreich); referencing Pindar, *Pythian Odes* 2.72–3.
61. Galen, *UP* 1.22 (3.80K = 1.58–9 Helmreich) (αὐλεῖν ἐπιχειροῦντα καὶ ὀρχεῖσθαι καὶ γράφειν καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἕκαστον ὧν ἄνθρωπος ὀρθῶς διαπράττεται; μίμημα γελοῖόν ἐστιν ἀνθρώπου); cf. 3.16, 11.2, 13.11, 15.8 (3.263-4, 848, 4.126, 251–2K = 1.194, 2.117, 273, 366–7 Helmreich).

CHAPTER 11

OVERCOMING HORROR: ‘NUMBNESS’ AND MEDICAL AGENTS – SOME THOUGHTS ON MEDICAL HORROR IN ANTIQUITY AND TODAY

Lutz Alexander Graumann

> Eryximachus, if you were where I am now . . . you would be petrified with fear and at a loss, like I am now.
>
> ὦ Ἐρυξίμαχε· εἰ δὲ γένοιο οὗ νῦν ἐγώ εἰμι . . . καὶ μάλ᾽ ἂν φοβοῖο καὶ ἐν παντὶ εἴης ὥσπερ ἐγὼ νῦν.
>
> Plato, *Symposium*[1]

Introduction

This essay originates from a minor, at first glance harmless question about my ideas on the topic of ‘horror’ in ancient medicine. I instantly had an intuitive desire to discuss personal horror in daily clinical practice and horror within medical education, residency and professional life, especially during the horrific Covid-19 pandemic of 2020–1.[2] I had already wondered many times about the possible emotional state of ancient doctors when confronted with their own ugly, disgusting things, horrific scenes of encountered diseases – think only of the disaster of the so-called ‘Athenian Plague’ that began in 430 BCE with all the helpless, dying Athenian doctors, as they are described in detail by Thucydides, even though he has doubtless narrated only his own specific social-political-historical version of what happened.[3] How could the ancient physician have shown empathy, and how far would he have acted with emotionless, professional distancing or, more negatively coloured, with apathy?[4] Can doctors/medical practitioners today, with their intrinsic experiences, compare their own medical professional behaviour – ranging from little empathy to indifferent behaviour in daily medical routine when confronted with death and terrible suffering – to that of their ancient forerunners? These questions imply some debate about coping strategies in medical careers today, which I will address at the end.

This kind of horror I am talking about already starts today during the first steps of a medical career, at the beginning of the study of medicine itself, during the obligatory course in basic human anatomy: the anatomical dissection of human cadavers.[5] Introducing a still obscure story, the French composer Hector Berlioz (1803–69), who

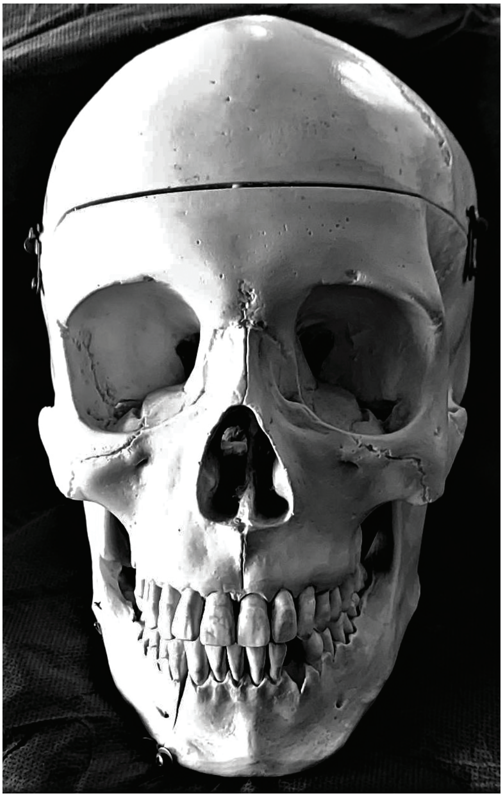


Figure 11.1 Plastic model of a human skull (photo: L. A. Graumann).

was in 1821/2 a medical freshman at the Hospice de la Pitié in Paris, described his first contact and experience with anatomical exercises and human dissection as 'a waking nightmare'. He recalled these incidents 'as though Death himself and all his grisly band were hot at my heels', and described his overwhelming feeling of revulsion at the sight of 'the limbs scattered about, the heads smirking, the skulls gaping, the bloody cesspool underfoot and the repulsive stench of that place'. One of the worst sights, he thought, was rats nibbling on bleeding vertebrae and swarms of sparrows pecking at the leftover scraps of spongy human lungs. Deeply disturbed and horrified, Berlioz left this nightmare spectacle by jumping out of the window (!) and running quickly home. Later, he discussed all this with his fellow student and cousin Alphonse Robert, who eventually convinced him to continue his medical studies. During his second time in the anatomical theatre, Berlioz could, to his great surprise, endure all this horror calmly. This episode in his life ended with Robert's remark: 'Bravo, Hector! You are humanizing yourself!'*[6] In this context, humanizing seems to equate to professional coping, enduring the horrific setting. But at what long-term costs, personal and psychological? I myself remember the disgusting smell of formalin in the dissecting rooms during my first steps in practical human anatomy nearly thirty years ago.

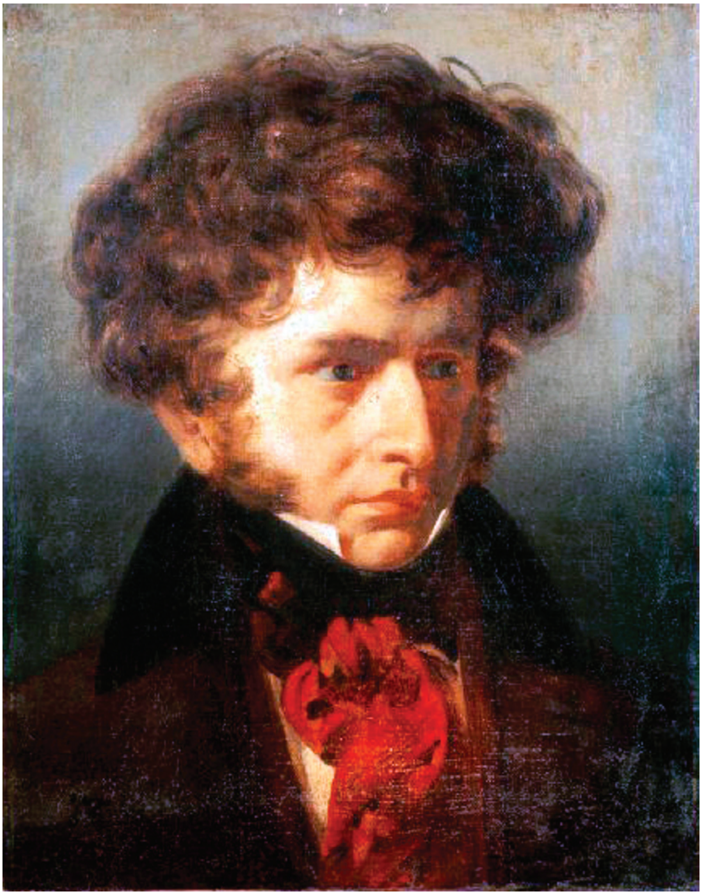


Figure 11.2 *Portrait of Hector Berlioz*, 1832, by Émile Signol (1804–92); current location: Villa Medici, Rome. Wikimedia Commons (public domain).

Defining topics: Medical agents, horror, numbness

Medical agents

Let me first consider what kind of people, i.e. medical agents, the who's who of medicine, are concerned with or, to be more specific, shocked by horrific situations during their professional activities. Even if there were in antiquity already many medical professionals who could have had horrific encounters during their practice, the people who are concerned with medicine and medical care now are heterogeneous and innumerable, which is to say that more and more players are entering the medical market and are thus possibly confronted by horrific medical situations, directly or indirectly.

In Graeco-Roman antiquity, there were first the doctors who performed the *technê iatrikê*, medicina: *iatros/iatrinê*, medicus/medica. Most of them seem to have been generalists, including practising general or basic surgery. But from early on there was already some tendency to specialization, sometimes depending on the workplace, e.g. elite court physicians (*archiatêr*), public physicians (for a city or village: *iatros dêmosios*/ medicus civitatis), naval doctors, army doctors (miles medicus), and slave doctors (perhaps themselves slaves). Depending on their focused activities, there were also established specialists, such as surgeons (*cheirourgos*, chirurgus), eye doctors, ear doctors, dentists, herniotomists and the like.[7] All these professionals were at times followed by apprentices, what we would call medical students. They also got help from special assistants (*hyperêtes*), 'sick watchers' (*diakônoi*), their own slaves and, of course, the patient's family and household staff. Other professions were attached to these medical activities, such as midwives (*maia*, obstetrix), nurses, masseuses (*aliptes*), apothecaries and herb-sellers (rhizotomoi, aromatarii, myropolae, pharmacopolae, pigmentarii, seplasiarii, thuriarii, unguentarii, syrmaiopôlês) and special medical military assistants (capsarii, marsi).

Today there is still the physician, who – at the end of a university course of study of medicine and time in residency – might be either a generalist (general practitioner) or a specialist: in modern Germany, for instance, there are more than thirty specialist titles (besides internist and surgeon, with many sub-specializations such as paediatric surgeon).[8] By number, the largest medical professional group today is nurses, who are themselves differentiated into many subspecialities (e.g. intensive care, geriatric care, paediatric care, emergency care, surgical care). Besides nurses, midwives and physiotherapists, in and out of the hospital, there are now also many technical assistants: nursing assistants, dieticians, respiratory therapists, radiographers, laboratory technicians, prosthetists, computer scientists, receptionists, transport service workers, material logistics specialists, entry guards, facility managers, etc. Furthermore, there are still pharmacists, pharmacy clerks, podologists, osteopaths and alternative practitioners ('Heilpraktiker' in German). Related to all these people is a huge, ever-growing institutionalized bureaucracy: administration and management of the hospital or the physician's office, health insurance companies, local and federal oversight institutions such as the Robert-Koch-Institut (Germany), the CDC (Center for Disease Control, USA), the FDA (Food and Drug Administration, USA) and so on. Here I will focus on two core groups of medical professionals: physicians and nurses, who have the most possibility of encountering horrific situations (*medical horror*) directly.

Horror medicinalis (medical horror)

'Horror' is a highly complex emotional topic. It is not only in antiquity that it becomes challenging to encapsulate this specific emotional experience or profile using simplistic terms like 'horror'.[9] For practical reasons, however, I will use the representative basic ancient terms Greek *phóbos* and Latin *metus*. In the previous chapters, many facets, categories, and to some extent holistic concepts of horror have already been addressed.[10] Here I focus on the already specific 'medical horror', or more accurately on the way I understand it: principally, this kind of horror includes a wide spectrum of sensations and emotions, such as dread, disgust, fear, fright and paralysis.[11] It can be and is in fact experienced every day by medical professionals in medical settings or situations, medical activities, and medical teaching and learning. But it is also experienced by concerned laymen, the patients themselves when they are seeking medical help, as also by relatives or custodians who accompany them during contact with healthcare professionals. I specifically mention here the innate fear that children have in medical settings, such as their fear of receiving stitches from a needle (needle fear) or undergoing other painful procedures. This special children's fear was already known in antiquity.[12]

Curiously, medical horror has greatly impressed extra-clinical media, literature (such as Mary Shelley's Gothic novel *Frankenstein*) and, of course, cinema. I cite only some film titles, well known to most moviegoers, which can be found using the search term 'medical horror': *The Fly* (USA 1986), *Flatliners* (USA 1990), *Nattevagten* (*Nightwatch*; DK 1994), *Anatomie* (D 2000).[13] I will return to this question later.

Medical 'numbness'

Coming now to the most often observed professional response to medical horror, I have intuitively chosen the term 'numbness'.[14] This is not exactly what 'numb' means literally or physically (to become anaesthetized). Instead, I understand the word in a broader, metaphorical sense. By 'medical numbness' I mean to suggest that the medical agent, after having experienced some *hyper*arousal by horror, becomes emotionally 'numb' or almost faint, *hypo*aroused, insensible or indifferent, losing some degree of 'good' professional empathy, 'gaining' distancing apathy. This can be interpreted today as a psychological reaction cascade directly caused by experienced horror in medical settings, which means a psychological, emotional trauma.[15] This reaction can be described as a momentary, instinctive, unconscious or, less frequently, conscious biopsychological coping mechanism (acute stress disorder) with possible long-term effects: chronic stress disorder, now called post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). According to Bracha's adaptational model, this psychological self-defence mechanism and its attendant emotions of *freeze, flight, fight, fright* and finally *fainting,* is an ancient one, hard-wired into human nature (evolutionary basis).[16] Of course, it varies from one person to another, depending on biological (age, sex) and interpersonal, social and cultural factors, and finally subjective (self-)assessment; each of these parameters plays an important role.[17] For example, women seem cross-culturally to be more vulnerable, with a phobia (psychopathological fear) prevalence twice as high as that in males.[18] In the field of medical psychology today, there are several useful explanatory models, such as behaviourist and psycho-biological approaches. To put it simply, the most observed psychological reactions to fear/fright/disgust are avoidance, emotional detachment ('numbness'), indifference, and the development of fearlessness, as exemplified by Hector Berlioz, as mentioned earlier.[19] In addition, this 'numbness' is the generally expected professional attitude in medicine and other healthcare professions in which the aim is to perform in a scientifically objective and emotionally neutral manner.[20]

Looking rapidly backward, I suppose that in some broader, diachronic perspective, there is an original linkage of this modern professional medical numbness to the ancient philosophical, Stoic, and partly Early Christian concept of *apatheia.*[21] As an example (skipping all ancient Graeco-Roman philosophical discourse), the church father Clement of Alexandria (Titus Flavius Clemens, *c.* 150–215 CE) wrote in his *Stromateis*:

> Awe is fear of the divine. But if **fear is a passion**, as some insist that fear is a passion, not every fear is a passion. Superstition is a passion, being **the fear of spiritual powers** [demons] which are themselves agitated by different passions. [2] On the other side, the fear of the **God who is free from passions** is itself free from passions. It is really not a fear of God but a fear of losing him. This fear is a fear of falling into evil; it is a fear of evil. Fear of falling is a desire for incorruptibility and for freedom from the passions. [3] 'A wise man in fearfulness turns away from evil, the fool confidently consorts with it,' says Scripture [*Proverbs* 14.16, 26], and again, 'In the fear of the Lord lies the hope of strength'.
>
> δέος δέ ἐστι φόβος θείου. ἀλλ᾽ εἰ καὶ **πᾶθος ὁ φόβος,** ὡς βούλονταί τινες, ὅτι **φόβος ἐστὶ πάθος**, οὐχ ὁ πᾶς φόβος πάθος. ἡ γοῦν δεισιδαιμονία πάθος, φόβος δαιμόνων οὖσα ἐχπαθῶν τε καὶ ἐμπαθῶν· ἔμπαλιν οὖν ὁ τοῦ **ἀπαθοῦς θεοῦ φόβος ἀπαθής**· φοβεῖται [2] γάρ τις οὐ τὸν θεόν, ἀλλὰ τὸ ἀποπεσεῖν τοῦ θεοῦ· ὁ δὲ τοῦτο δεδιὼς τὸ τοῖς κακοῖς περιπεσεῖν φοβεῖται καὶ δέδιεν τὰ κακά· ὁ δεδιὼς δὲ τὸ πτῶμα ἄφθαρτον ἑαυτὸν καὶ ἀπαθῆ εἶναι βούλεται. »σοφὸς [3] φοβηθεὶς ἐξέκλινεν ἀπὸ κακοῦ, ὁ δὲ ἄφρων μίγνυται πεποιθώς,« ἡ γραφὴ λέγει· αὖθίς τε »ἐν φόβῳ κυρίου ἐλπὶς ἰσχύος« φησίν.[22]

Here the experienced *apatheia* (freedom of passion, insensitivity) seems to be differentiated and interpreted by Clement ambivalently, either positively as losing *irrational fear* (*phóbos apathês*) of superstitious evil and becoming like God and Jesus, or negatively as losing the *normal rational 'protective' fear-shield* for the faithful soul.[23]

Graeco-Roman antiquity: Some selected *topoi* of medical horror

Turning now to the medical context of Graeco-Roman antiquity, I would like to start with the *locus classicus* for terrible (*deiná*) medical encounters in the Hippocratic treatise *On Breaths* (*De flatibus* 1; 6.90, 4–6 Littré; late fifth century BCE):

> For the physician *sees* terrible sights, *touches* unpleasant things, and the misfortunes of others bring a harvest of *sorrows* that are peculiarly his.
>
> ὁ μὲν γὰρ ἰητρὸς ὁρῇ τε δεινά, θιγγάνει τε ἀηδέων, ἐπ᾽ ἀλλοτρίῃσί τε συμφορῇσιν ἰδίας καρποῦται λύπας.[24]

Interestingly, here only two of the five classical senses (sight and touch) are mentioned, leaving it to the reader or listener to add smell, taste and hearing/listening.[25] The author concludes with especially strong emotions: the suffering of the patient generates *lúpê*, sorrow, harm, grief, and much distress for the attending physician himself. But what does this mean exactly? The German medical historian Karl-Heinz Leven has recently – and convincingly, in my view – explained this statement in his brief commentary on this treatise: the author combines an appeal for real empathy with the suffering patient with a need to remain clinically and professionally detached.[26] Brooke Holmes calls this a 'disembodied' technique: the physician stands outside looking in at the body, which is not only observed but manipulated.[27] The text continues with what can be referred to as the patient's side, view, or better duty (6.90, 6–8 Littré):

> But the sick by means of the art rid themselves of the *worst of evils*, *diseases*, *suffering*, *pains* (and) *death*.
>
> οἱ δὲ νοσέοντες ἀποτρέπονται διὰ τὴν τέχνην τῶν μεγίστων κακῶν, νούσων, λύπης, πόνων, θανάτου.

The author is thus referring back to the famous Hippocratic triangle mentioned in the *Epidemics* (*Epid.* 1.5; 2.636, 1–4 Littré): medical art (*téchnê iatrikê*) consists of three (f) actors, the disease, the physician, and the patient. The patient, ideally in collaboration with the physician, is the one who fights and overcomes the various components of any dreadful disease: suffering, pain, and ultimately death.[28]

Another relevant remark is found in Aristotle's *Parts of Animals* (written around 350 BCE). In his introduction to the study of animal nature, Aristotle describes the 'disgust' produced by close anatomy, human or animal, for the eye of the beholder:

> If, however, anyone holds that the study of other living creatures is an unworthy pursuit, he ought to go further and hold the same opinion about the study of himself, for *it is impossible,* without considerable *disgust, to look upon* the blood, flesh, bones, blood vessels, and similar parts from which the human body is constructed.
>
> εἰ δὲ τις τὴν περὶ τῶν ἄλλων ζῴων θεωρίαν ἄτιμον εἶναι νενόμικε, τὸν αὐτὸν τρόπον οἴεσθαι χρὴ καὶ περὶ αὑτοῦ· οὐκ ἔστι γὰρ ἄνευ πολλῆς δυσχερείας ἰδεῖν ἐξ ὧν συνέστηκε τὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων γένος, οἷον αἷμα, σάρκες, ὀστᾶ, φλέβες καὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα μόρια[29]

At first sight, this is curious, given that Aristotle was himself the son of a physician and thus surely to some extent accustomed to and trained for medical observation. Does he, a keen biological researcher, describe some anthropological constant, calling it 'disgust'? My impression is that Aristotle reports both a glimpse of his own personal development as researcher and his experience with average human beings of his time. He is indicating especially his own experience that scientific research on the human or animal body/

nature presupposes this kind of emotionless manner. Aristotle thus declares here that he himself has overcome this archetypical 'disgust'.[30]

A short case study: A horrific ancient birth setting

I could certainly have cited many individual ancient medical and non-medical reports or cases of horrific things.[31] But I offer this short medical case story or case note (perhaps intended for further internal discussion) in the *Epidemics* – itself a pearl of medical literature within the Hippocratic collection[32] – a horrific birth setting (*Epid.* 2.2.19; 5.92, 3–7 Littré):

> The wife of Antigenes, of Nicomachus' house, produced a child that was flesh with the largest limbs distinguished, about four fingers in breadth, boneless, a thick globular exterior.
>
> ἡ Ἀντιγένεος ἡ τῶν περὶ Νικόμαχον ἔτεκε παιδίον, σαρκῶδες μέν, ἔχον δὲ τὰ μέγιστα διακεκριμένα, μέγεθος δὲ ὡς τετραδάκτυλον, ἀνόστεον, ὕστερον δὲ παχὺ στρογγύλον.*[33]

This monstrous boneless newborn, which the author describes only very roughly, could be interpreted in modern terms as a 'fetus carnosus': an extremely deformed newborn with no chance for survival.[34] I refrain from offering a modern picture of this 'ugly' pathological condition and leave it to the reader's imagination.

Brooke Holmes has argued from a narrative perspective that clinical descriptions like this one are tokens of early scientific objectivity due to their complete omission of the physician's own sentiments, making the reporting physician himself 'disembodied'.[35] I believe, however, that anthropologically it *must* have been psychologically challenging to examine, touch, and explore such a body the first time, the second time, and so forth, even in the ancient world. Such a horrific scene, probably with a 'mother in shock', *must* have produced an interpersonal emotional reaction on the part of the physician.[36] The attending physicians, despite the absence of any reported emotions here or elsewhere in the Hippocratic collection – except for the previously mentioned passage in *De flatibus* 1 – *must* have undoubtedly experienced intense feelings such as horror, fear, or disgust, albeit within their own individual realms of experience and at varying psychological depths.

Horrific vivisections

Galen of Pergamon (129–*c.* 210 CE) in the course of his medical career performed many anatomical dissections in private and in public, even vivisection on animals, or animal models, whose anatomy more or less resembled human anatomy, usually apes (macaque species), pigs, goats, dogs, or oxen.[37] Human, even human cadaver, dissection was culturally not accepted in his time.[38] In the context of his live experiments (vivisections) concerned with voice formation, Galen gave his readers strong, firm advice not to perform this on apes for the following reason:

> [Instead of an ape] you must procure either a pig or a goat, in order to combine two requirements: in the first place, you avoid *seeing the unpleasant expression* of the ape when it is being vivisected. The other reason is that the animal on which the dissection takes place should *cry out* with a really *loud* voice, a thing one does not find with apes.[39]

Caroline Petit has recognized here a 'chill of horror' for both the audience and the reader of Galen.[40] But Galen himself, at least, reports this scientifically in a calm way, using the relatively neutral expression 'unpleasant'.[41] Watching such bloody and noisy vivisections till the final cut would have been 'emotionally distasteful', as Claire Bubb puts it, and 'was not for the faint of heart'.[42] For Galen and his assistants, attending medical colleagues, and the many non-medical, interested lay spectators at his public anatomical demonstrations, there was some thrill, but probably no more horror, since they eventually got used to such sights after repeated visits to such shows.[43] In my view, they overcame the horror to some extent by experience, and achieved *apatheia* to this point.[44]

Modern times: Comparable aspects?

After this brief horror journey into Graeco-Roman antiquity, I move on to recent times by 'zooming out' from the individual medical perspective to collective views.

Individual perception: Horror of blood

First, there is the physiological phenomenon of medically induced fainting: an adverse reaction to exposure to blood, bleeding, or blood loss (horror of seeing blood), especially one's own blood, which results in fainting, explicable in pathophysiological terms as a vasovagal-related stress reaction (syncope). This globally observed fear, termed *hemophobia*, is not completely understood – its origins are notably obscure – and possible prevention and behavioural measures are far from perfect.[45] Curiously, while I was presenting and writing this chapter, my current young female surgical assistant told me that, even after many years of professionalization, she continues to suffer from this reaction, i.e. she still faints when she sees her own blood, despite being an experienced resident in general surgery.

Individual and collective perception: Public medical horror of 'Kids in Cages'

I chose this example of collective medical horrific emotion randomly, not intentionally or even socio-politically. Severe medical conditions were observed in Clint, Texas in summer 2019, as a consequence of the treatment by immigration police of migrant children, who were held in an internment camp described as keeping 'birds in a cage'. Many local US physicians protested loudly against these conditions.[46] Ultimately, Columbia University cancelled its medical supply contract with the Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) agency; one faculty member, Elora Mukherjee, complained: 'I've seen lots of horrible, shocking things, but never before had I witnessed such degrading and appalling conditions for children in federal immigration custody as what I saw in Clint in June 2019'.*[47]

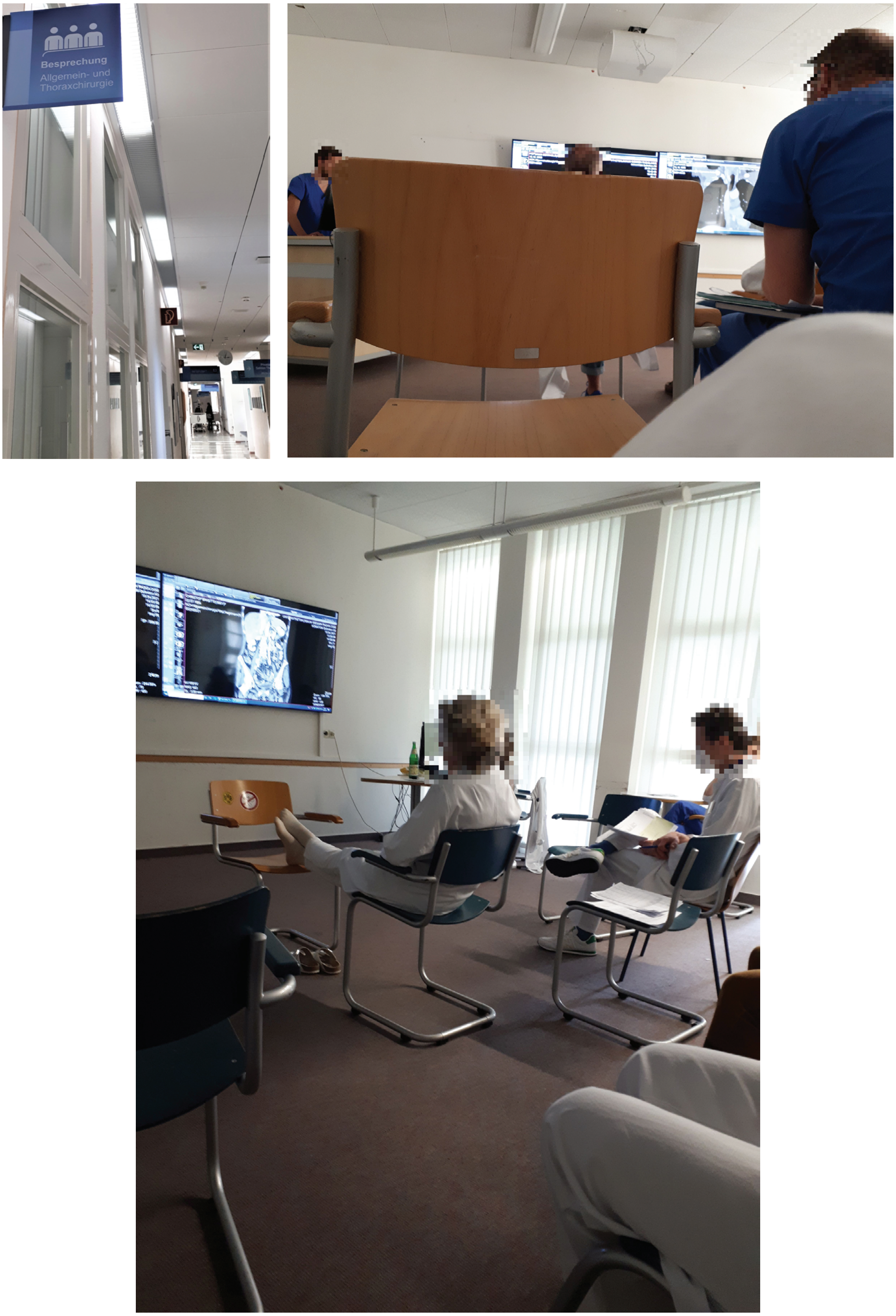
Individual and/or group (team) perception: Horror in medical minds

Next, I would like to focus on medical group or team dynamics relating to horror exposure. My example is the normal radiological round at the Department of General Surgery, Gießen University Hospital. On working days, nearly all surgeons belonging to the clinic are summoned at the same time, usually 3.00 pm, to the Medical Meeting Room, along with the attending radiologist, and present and discuss current, future and past patients' clinical stories using their radiographies (two-dimensional artefacts) to reconstruct pathologies and construct and plan surgical strategies together with the overall process of surgeries for the next day or days to come. In addition, this round offers feedback from the day's surgery to the radiologist and the plenum in order to improve management and diagnostic skills, and to maintain the quality of surgical therapy. These rounds are also intended for educational purposes for attending medical students, assistants and residents.

Every case that is studied has its own history. The group listens to and recognizes adverse developments by viewing the two-dimensional radiographies on a wall, for example a computer tomography (CT) of the abdomen showing viscera full of cancerous metastases. The medical professional participating reconstructs for themself a full four-dimensional picture of the case, the individual patient, their hopes, and their possible future, including their relatives in the discussion. After group consultation, the medical director or the attending assistant decides about therapeutic strategies, or sometimes opts to end medical therapy. Being confronted, watching and listening to many consecutive unfavourable cases – more than thirty cases are often discussed one after another over a period of less than an hour – at times produces overwhelming sadness and horrific images in every participant's mind, which on the other hand can grasp the whole biomedical and social situation. The excessive emotion aroused by horrific mental pictures sometimes bursts out in grumbling or expressions of fright like 'Terrible' or 'Awful' during these rounds. But I have never heard anyone say 'Disgusting'. All attendees at this meeting take their emotions home. Medical participants are expected to endure this procedure through a kind of peer pressure. There is no discussion and no psychological debriefing or feedback regarding it.[48]

Scientific community language: Triple horror

'Triple horror' is also professional medical jargon, here exemplified by the occurrence of three cancers in a single patient: a twenty-seven-year-old woman, who first developed carcinoma of the right breast and then, two years later, after chemotherapy, mastectomy


Besprechung
Allgemein- und
Thoraxchirurgie

Figures 11.3–11.5 Daily radiological round, Gießen, University Hospital, Surgery 2021 (photos: L. A. Graumann).

and another round of chemotherapy and radiotherapy, multiple skeletal and brain metastases. After more therapy, she displayed further metastases in both lungs; a lung biopsy was performed and revealed another tumour, a malignant spindle-cell tumour. Palliative chemotherapy was begun, but a tumorous swelling at the edge of her tongue appeared, and a biopsy revealed another malignant spindle-cell tumour. Finally she 'succumbed to respiratory failure'. This threefold metachronous malignancy occurrence was termed a 'triple horror' by the reporting physicians in their publication.[49]

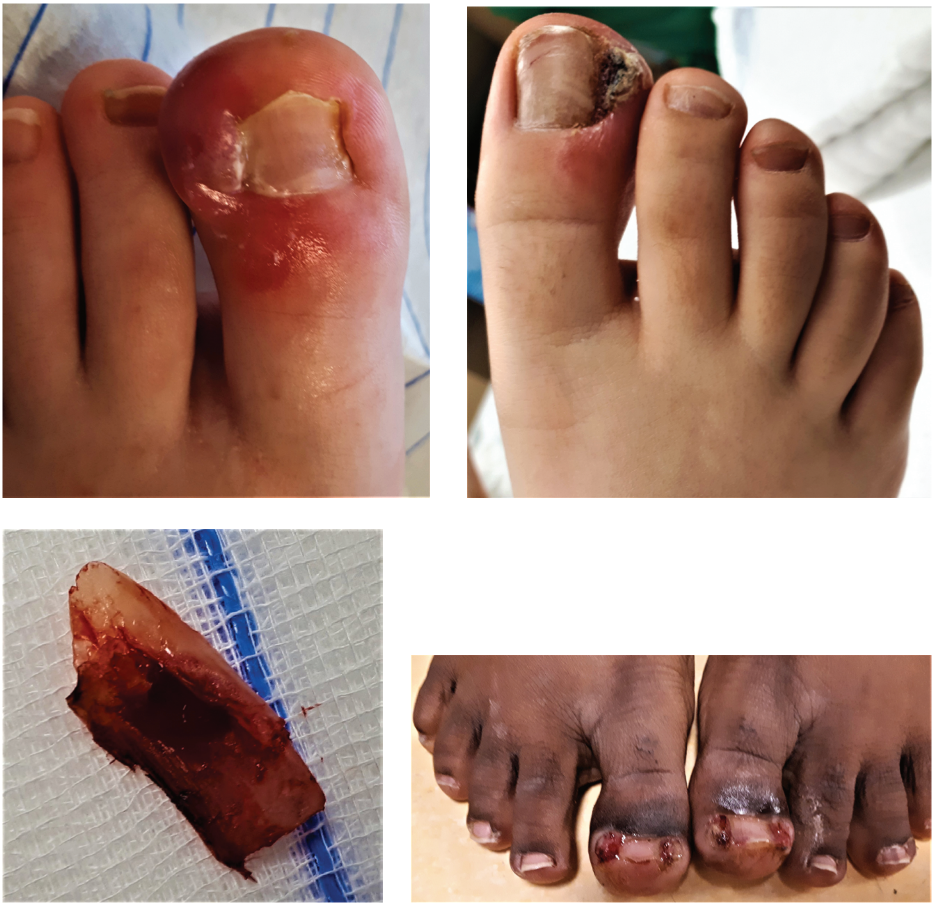
Specific medical horror: Ingrown toenails (*unguis incarnatus*)

I could of course show many ugly, horrific medical scenarios. These would have upset most of you as medical laymen, and some readers might have felt obliged to close this book instantly, finding it unbearable. For that reason, I have chosen a minor and less harmless, but very common ugly disorder. This is a tiny but common disgusting medical problem, today a disease of civilization that mostly affects young adolescents after failed self-pedicures or incorrect cutting of the toenails, and that most often affects the nail of the big toe. This results in lateral ingrowing of the nail and severe inflammation (see close-up in Figures 11.6–9), for which the technical medical term is *unguis incarnatus*, or onychocryptosis. The specialists who deal with this are podologists, general and paediatric surgeons, and dermatologists.

The clinical finding itself, but also the surgical treatment – no matter how tiny both really are – horrify the attending staff, including medical students. Even experienced assisting surgical and anaesthetic nurses have told me more than once about the special disgust and horror they feel during the minor surgery (simply described, excision and extinction of a part of the nail), which is even greater than that which comes from participating in a major viscera-mutilating abdominal surgery. For many years I personally have been able to perform this therapy with calm, professional emotional 'numbness' or distancing 'apathy', but not without empathy. But I have often experienced attending students, mostly women, suddenly fainting during the procedure. This shock and disgust are of course also experienced by the patients themselves, rarely verbalized but, if it is, patients' testimonies call ingrown toenails a real 'horror'.[50] In any case, this modern disease of the young seems to have been observed already in Graeco-Roman antiquity, given some fatalistic remarks by Seneca and therapeutic recommendations by Galen.[51] Did Galen or his medical assistants feel similar horror when they treated patients with ingrown toenails in second-century Rome? Or could there have been some positive connotation at this time? I think not.

Covid-19 horror

Coming to Covid-19 horror, many readers will have horrific hospital pictures of this pandemic threat in their minds: extremely ill, artificially ventilated, comatose patients in ICU wards, treated and cared for by completely cloaked medical staff, doctors and nurses,



Figures 11.6–11.9 Clinical examples of severe ingrown toenails; Figure 11.8 shows the excised part of one ingrown nail (photos: L. A. Graumann).

and strictly isolated from family members.[52] This has left deep marks in our collective memory. Known worldwide is the case of ICU nurse Kathryn Ivey from Nashville, who posted selfies from her graduation in March 2020 and after a twelve-hour shift in the Covid ward (November 2020): the horror and distress in her face and especially her eyes have 'gone viral.'[53] Meanwhile, it is a scientific fact that the massive workload and extended contact with Covid-19 patients in isolated ICU wards are affecting nurses in particular psychologically, leading to stress, exhaustion, and long-term depression. At time of writing, this has resulted in massive loss of staff in hospitals, especially ICU wards, worldwide.[54]

Pandemic horror and overcoming horror in filmography

To return to film media, I would like to draw attention to one special, pre-Covid-era movie: *Contagion* (USA 2011) directed by Steven Soderbergh.[55] There are many similarities between the film and the circumstances of the Covid-19 pandemic: possible infection source, origin in Asia, tentative action by the CDC, anonymous mass graves, etc. This movie, with its murky subtitle 'Nothing spreads like fear', produced a large-scale thought experiment that has become truth in Covid-19. Watching this movie now, more than ten years after its first release, is thus not just lurking horror but real-world horror.

Curiously, horror movies have some lesser-known 'hygienic' psychological impact: intriguingly, 'horror fans' who regularly consume horror media, and especially those who watch movies like *Contagion* or horror shocker serials directed by John Carpenter (*The Fog*, *Halloween*) or Wes Craven (*Nightmare on Elm Street*, *Scream*), are probably better shielded against negative psychological effects from the pandemic. This is what an international collaborative psychological study of the Universities of Chicago and Aarhus concluded.[56] The researchers described horror fans as people with a 'morbid curiosity' and trained in exposure to fictional fright, which in turn allows them to practise effective, beneficial coping strategies in real-world situations such as the Covid-19 pandemic. It would be interesting to test this in medical education by showing students horror movies on a regular, scientifically followed basis. Strangely enough, in 2020, one (now former) American medical student, Phillip Luis Anjum, released a short, low-budget horror movie blandly entitled 'History of Present Illness', in which he adapted his personal experiences in human anatomy courses as a freshman at the Ohio State University College of Medicine in Columbus.[57] This somewhat disturbing medical horror film produced substantial discussions in medical circles locally and even internationally.[58]

Conclusions

> Rarely, yet now and then, however, delirium is the product of fright.
>
> *Raro sed aliquando tamen ex metu delirium nascitur.*
>
> Celsus, *On Medicine*[59]

The daily experience of horror in medicine (*horror medicinalis*) is a worldwide and timeless phenomenon, which I firmly believe was also undeniably present in the ancient past, based on my medical and particularly clinical-practical perspective. However, it is important to note that in Graeco-Roman antiquity, the understanding of horror may not align precisely with modern definitions, as horror is influenced by contextual factors to some extent. Medical horror, like other typical human emotional reactions, seems to be part of an inherent, universal anthropological constant, as in the above-mentioned exemplary case of hemophobia (fear and fainting caused by seeing blood). As human beings, therefore, ancient physicians in their own medical context *must* have experienced the same core, archetypical medical horror emotion as modern medical professionals do in their own context.

It has recently been argued at length that Graeco-Roman physicians, at least those whose reports of their professional work are found in the Hippocratic collection, did their work 'disembodied' (Brooke Holmes, George Kazantzidis). In fact, such emotions are almost absent from the writings of the Hippocratic collection. These physicians show no sign of emotional reaction, meaning that they seem to have managed their emotional states very well; Hippocratic physicians are said to have possessed 'remarkable resilience'.*[60] In my partisan view as clinician, however, this is probably far from the truth, another unilateral misinterpretation of the ancient medical sources from an overly narrow narrative view and a contingent argument from silence. Like the missing explicit developed medical theory and missing explicit mention of specific medical diagnoses, especially in the case histories in the Hippocratic *Epidemics*, the 'avoidance' of physicians' emotions is an authorial and rhetorical choice.[61] I believe that the apparent avoidance of personal feelings especially in the Hippocratic writings is *not* necessarily a sign of the physicians' resilience, but rather a deliberate authorial and rhetorical decision in short, selected and biased texts that concentrate mostly on the patient's signs. In my opinion, medical emotions, especially medical horror, are inherent and only partially influenced by culture. The interpretation of a 'disembodied medical authority', to the effect that ancient Greek physicians 'consistently avoid expressing any kind of personal feeling during their medical practice',*[62] is thus a text-based misinterpretation. On this view, the ancient physicians, as trained professionals – I am exaggerating intentionally – would have felt nothing negative during their clinical work, and would today be declared psychopaths, with no emotions.

Considering the emotional toll of medical horror as a fundamental aspect of human experience, would it not be reasonable to expect some evidence of intra-professional training in antiquity aimed at helping individuals cope with and overcome this horror, thus promoting their emotional well-being? Although it is explicitly mentioned very early on (as in the Hippocratic Corpus, *De flatibus* 1), I can trace no clear, real solution to the professional 'numbness' response in antiquity. Indeed, when reconsidering the absence of explicit diagnoses and implicit disease conceptions in the *Epidemics*, it becomes less clear to assert that ancient physicians were likely able to cope well psychologically with the challenges they faced, based solely on the surviving written sources. This kind of positive reading is only one possible, contingent interpretation. I believe that coping with horrific situations remained an unsolved dilemma for ancient medical professionals, perhaps resulting on occasion in violent behaviour towards patients. Unlike today, transcending this limiting emotion of horror seems to have been regarded mostly as a philosophical problem or goal ('*apatheia*'). Coping remained a personal matter, resolved by individuals themselves sometimes with the help of philosophy ('care for the soul').[63]

Uncontrolled pathophysiological reactions of a sort known today, i.e. pathological coping strategies to the emotional stress of horror, produce unresolved internal mental conflicts, and after many months of stress, repetition can lead to what is now called PTSD. These internal conflicts externalize or somaticize themselves in the form of growing indifference, numbness, an ice-cold affect, loss of empathy, *apathy*, and even cruelty towards other human (and non-human) beings, especially by healthcare professionals towards their patients: the modern keyword is 'violence in nursing'. Indeed, already in antiquity – see my reference to Clement above – there was much philosophical debate about positive and negative apathy, *apatheia*.[64] These discussions were eventually revived in the Age of Enlightenment, for example in Immanuel Kant's Prussian-Protestant-coloured 'Tugendlehre' (Doctrine of Virtue) from 1797: already in the wide-ranging introduction to his 'Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Tugendlehre', Kant described 'Apathie' (the ancient Stoic *apatheia*) as formerly associated with *bad* repute (weakness, indifference). He accordingly redefined and elevated it into a *good professional* duty, calling it 'moral apathy' (power, temperance of affective behaviour).[65] Later, in paragraph 7 of his main discussion, Kant returned to the topic of apathy, stating that *cruel, violent behaviour* toward non-humans (plants, minerals, animals) blunts or weakens moral apathy into pitilessness even toward humans.[66] Since then, I believe, it has been, and to some extent still is, a traditional modern practice at least in the Western medical professions (physicians, nurses, etc.) to develop a psychological mechanism known as 'professional distancing apathy'. This involves suppressing emotions, with the risk of becoming too apathetic and losing the presumed initially high level of empathy for patients. For example, I have experienced numerous times during critical situations in complex surgical procedures, such as major bleeding, that the lead surgeon sternly instructs the assistants: 'No noise, no emotions!' Disgust, shame and fear, as negative and tainted emotions, have been and continue to be taboo in modern rational biomedical practice. They are not major topics in education or current professional training.[67] Even worse, many medical educators still re-enact this bad tradition of insensibility ('Tradition verordneter Empfindungslosigkeit').[68] A classic saying goes as follows: 'Everybody in medicine has to take care of their own business and find their own way of coping with it'.*[69] According to another traditional opinion, such emotional stressors are crucial to cultivate good health care professionals: they should *not talk* too much about their own psychological troubles, such as burnout, in order to avoid creating a self-fulfilling prophecy. 'Good' healthcare professionals are professional enough to 'tackle this themselves'.[70] But this would be a sad reiterated gaze into the future of medical professionals, since there is a solution.

Some more optimistic outlook: Empowering medical resilience by narrating

> But when they [the Apostles] saw him [Jesus] walking upon the sea, they supposed it was a ghost, and cried out; /
>
> for they all saw him and were horrified. Immediately **he talked with them**, and said to them:
>
> ***Take courage! It's me, don't be afraid!***
>
> οἱ δὲ ἰδόντες αὐτὸν ἐπὶ τῆς θαλάσσης περιπατοῦντα ἔδοξαν ὅτι φάντασμά ἐστιν καὶ ἀνέκραξαν, /

> πάντες γὰρ αὐτὸν εἶδαν καὶ ἐταράχθησαν. ὁ δὲ εὐθὺς **ἐλάλησεν μετ᾽ αὐτῶν** καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς
> **Θαρσεῖτε, ἐγώ εἰμι, μὴ φοβεῖσθε**.
> Gospel of Mark[71]

From a more optimistic perspective, it is important to recognize that emotions such as shame, guilt and fear are natural and human, even at the top of the medical profession. While there has been a traditional practice of suppressing these emotions in order to maintain a sense of emotional equanimity, there is growing recognition of the importance of acknowledging and addressing these emotions in a healthier, more human way. The first step in overcoming medical horror is to remove taboos and to discuss it fearlessly and openly.[72] Professional conversation and discussion in safe spaces are the key factors. Empathetic sharing of emotions and talking with experienced senior colleagues or professional supervision by experts in trauma psychology protect the individual healthcare worker from adverse feelings and behaviours resulting from horror events. This strategy can be called 'de-narrating medical horror', with the main aim to remodel negative apathy into positive conduct. Today, this psychological objective is called *resilience*, or in the case of healthcare professionals *medical resilience*. In recent times, in reaction to the long path to healthcare professionalization and the ever-growing global shortage of medical staff, this topic has gained importance as a means of preventing the loss of staff due to burnout, emotional breakdown, and even suicide, and to prevent apathic malpractice.[73] Overcoming secondary stress in healthcare professionals is a key factor for successful medicine in this century, even more so following the Covid-19 pandemic.[74] Besides post-traumatic de-narration of medical horror events, prevention by introducing the topic into medical curricula (nursing schools and medical faculties) is also important.[75] One illuminating recent example: medical horror includes the fear of making errors during nursing or treatment. In order to prevent medical mistakes, it is important to be aware of them beforehand, or at least of the most common ones (Pareto principle). This can be done by means of prepared dummy rooms, specifically designed with numerous physical and psychological pitfalls (artificially installed errors). These errors must be detected by healthcare staff members within a short time window. The training rooms are often referred to as 'Rooms of Horrors' or, less alarmingly, 'Rooms of Errors'.[76] I believe it is reasonable and essential to establish similar training units for doctors' conduct and for the psychological well-being of other healthcare professionals. For instance, self-reflective round-table discussions or even supervised consumption of horror media could serve as effective methods.[77] Of course, some psychological preselection has already taken place before the official start of professional work, such as during the first semesters of studying medicine at a university through the classic human anatomy dissection course.[78] Learning professional distancing does not exclude experience of uncharted medical horror: medicine itself teaches and challenges horror every day anew.[79]

In closing, I regret that many questions are left untouched here. Does it truly make sense to apply the modern concept of medical resilience to the ancient medical context?

To what extent can one speculate *ex silencio* about unexpressed horror in the limited amount of transmitted ancient medical literature, arguing for the anthropological constancy of human psychology?[80] Is there a consistent anthropological connection between the feeling of horror and empathy in healthcare professionals? Are there more written traces in ancient non-medical literature that suggest the availability of extensive external psychological support for dealing with horror stress, and if so, by whom (only ancient philosophy)? Could one explain signs of violent and cruel behaviour by ancient physicians towards their patients as a result of experiencing too much medical horror? At this point, it seems plausible to me to provide cautious positive answers, although I cannot delve further into these topics here.[81] As a medical professional still in practice, however, I feel obliged to convey a simple practical message: the horror in the eyes of our patients serves as a constant reminder that we must maintain a professional distance from that feeling, while remaining empathetic and human at the same time.[82]

Notes

1. Plato *Symp.* 194a (Socrates' reply to a joyful statement by the Athenian physician Eryximachus); my translation.
2. I would like to acknowledge the kind invitation and great and unique possibility of presenting my quite different, scattered thoughts, and the subsequent inspiring discussion at the fine 'Roots' conference in Kiel, Christian Albrechts University, on 20 November 2021. In particular, I would like to thank Chiara Thumiger and George Kazantzidis for their countless helpful critical impulses and enormous patience.
3. Thuc. 2.47.4: 'The physicians . . . themselves suffered the highest mortality since they were the ones most exposed to it [the Plague]'; 2.51.2–5: 'Some people died from neglect, others despite devoted care. Not a single remedy was found, one has to say, whose application guaranteed relief, since what helped one person harmed another . . . it swept them all away, whatever kind of care and treatment they had received'; transl. Mynott 2013: 118, 121. Also cited and briefly discussed by Holmes 2010: 26f.; 2013: 431f., and Kazantzidis 2017: 63 n. 42.
4. As introduction to ancient medical empathy, see Kazantzidis 2017.
5. On the psychological issues for medical students today caused by the dissection course see e.g. Limbrecht et al. 2013, Boeckers and Boeckers 2016.
6. *Mémories, ch. V*: Bloom 2019: 153f., Fitzharris 2018: 39. I am only hinting here at the specific German translation of this latter monograph's title: '*Der Horror der frühen Medizin*'. I would like to thank my colleague Jens G. Riedel for calling my attention to this more popular title.
7. See for example Galen's long list in *Thras.* 24 (5,846,1–851,11 K.).
8. See the recent, representative overview of physician specialists in the federal state of Hessen: https://www.laekh.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Aerzte/Weiterbildung/WBO_2020.pdf (accessed 12 May 2024).
9. Spencer 2017a: 11: 'I consider a more fundamental lexical point, namely, that *no single term (or set of terms) in any language adequately captures the dense texture of emotional experience*'* (emphasis original); Spencer favours and borrows the concept of 'emotional profiles' from Kagan (2010).

10. See contributions in this volume, especially the 'Introduction' by Thumiger/Kazantzidis. On the spectrum of meanings of the Latin term '*horror*' (fright, dread, fear, trembling from fear etc.), see OLD, s.v. *horror* (Glare 1982: 805). Predominantly, horror today corresponds in my view to a wide extent to the emotion of fear (*phóbos, metus*). On the transformation history of *phóbos* from antiquity to today, see Böhme 2009 and, more exemplary, Konstan 2009: 35–7. *Phóbos,* Latin *metus*, was a constant, original item in the list of emotions (*tà pathé, perturbationes*) in ancient philosophical discourses: e.g. Plato, *Laws (Nomoi)* 1, 644c6–d1; Aristotle, *NE* 2.4 (1105b21–3), *De anima* 1.1 (403a16–18), *Rhet.* 2.1.1 (1378a19–22); see Karjczynski and Rapp 2009: 64–7, Spencer 2017a: 30 (fear as a basic emotion in biblical literature). On *metus*, e.g. Cicero, *Tusc.* 4.14 ('*metus opinio impedentis mali, quod intolerabile esse videatur*'); see Weisser 2021: 25. Of course, in addition to *metus/horror*, there are many other Greek/Latin nouns denoting fright and horror, such as *phrikē, thámbos, deinós,* or *timor, pavor, terror*.
11. On the contingency of emotions such as 'horror' (contextual, socio-cultural, biological, cognitive and phenomenal dependency), with a special focus on the ancient context, see Harbsmeier/Möckel 2009, Konstan 2009, Karjczynski and Rapp 2009 (a concise summary of emotions in ancient philosophy). The explicit terminological association or categorization of 'medicine' with 'horror' (medical horror) is a modern development and was unknown in Graeco-Roman antiquity, as far as I know.
12. Plato, *Gorg.* 479a: '[Socrates] φοβούμενος ὡσπερανεὶ παῖς τὸ κάεσθαι καὶ τὸ τέμνεσθαι, ὅτι ἀλγεινόν (fearing cautery and incision just as a child would, because it is painful)'; my translation. German translation (Michael Erler in Platon 2011: 107): 'weil er sich wie ein Kind vor dem Brennen und Schneiden fürchtet, da es schmerzhaft ist'.* On universal healthcare aspects of needle fear and needle phobia, see the meta-analysis in McLenon and Rogers 2019. For more on children's psycho-traumatology, see Landolt 2021.
13. Search item 'Medical Horror' in IMDb (Internet Movie Database; imdb.com) https://www.allhorror.com/subgenre/medical; search realized in November 2021.
14. In my Symposium presentation and in the first draft of this chapter I used the term 'faintness' ('Ohnmacht', to lose consciousness), but in several discussions I was convinced, especially by George Kazantzidis, that the English term 'numbness' is much more apt for the emotional response I am referring to.
15. Vegge 2017: 249–50, discusses and uses exactly these modern psychological and neuroscientific paradigms in the case of Mark 6.45-52, which he interprets as the emotional reaction of 'numbness' in Jesus' disciples.
16. Bracha 2004. See also Böhme 2009: 168–70 ('Angst ist eine elementare Gegebenheit des animalischen Lebens' [fear is an elementary fact of animal life], and 'Angst [ist] eine Elementar-Emotion auch des menschlichen Organismus' [fear is an elementary emotion of the human organism too]).* On the biological aspects of fear/anxiety, see Eibl 2013. Against this theory of 'universal archetypical emotions', see Feldman Barrett 2017, but also the negative reply to her by Spencer 2017a: 30 n. 91. On the 'fear' sequence of *fright and flight* I mention here the classic passage in Homer, *Iliad* 22.131–7, where Hector, catching sight of Achilles' terrible spear ('μελίην δεινήν'), shudders ('τρόμος') and runs off in fearful flight ('βῆ δὲ φοβηθείς'); on this passage, see now Van Emde Boas 2022: 65–70.
17. Lateiner and Spatharas 2017: 2 name four factors relating to the emotion of disgust: social concerns, moral values, aesthetic evaluations, and cultural variations. Spencer 2017a: 33 counts six intersecting aspects of emotions: cognitive, motivational, relational, and value laden, along with a somatic and a narrative dimension. He also warns against too many personalized, internalized emotional 'boxes' resulting from biological-scientifical reductionism; Spencer 2017a: 24.

18. Broche-Pérez et al. 2022 (regarding fear of Covid-19), Chen et al. 2009, McLenon/Rogers 2019 (needle phobia). Ovarian hormones such as oestrogen seem to play some role; Glover et al. 2015.
19. Conceptually, Hartmut Böhme calls this self-constrained professional distancing a civilized technique of coping with fear ('Angstbewältigungstechnik') which qualifies for 'autogenous anesthesia and fearless performance' ('befähigt zu einer autogenen Anästhesie und deswegen zum angstlosen . . . Handeln')*, Böhme 2009: 178. The attachment theory counts 'numbing' (shock and disbelief) as an initial emotional experience in many people to the horrifying news of a loved one's death (emotion of grief); Bosworth 2017: 123–7.
20. For more details about modern pathogenic, neuroscientific models, including trauma biology, see Landolt 2021: 90–122, Leinweber et al. 2017 (relating to midwives).
21. Or '*apathia*'. On the ancient philosophical controversy between the more radical '*apatheia*' (eradication of almost all emotions, including fear) of the Stoics and the more moderate '*metriopatheia*' of the Peripatetics, see Weisser 2021. On this debate in Galen as a postclassical, innovative contribution, see Kaufman 2022.
22. Clement of Alexandria, *Str.* II.8.40, 1–3 (Stählin 1906: 134), transl. Ferguson 1991: 185f.; German translation: https://bkv.unifr.ch/de/works/cpg-1377 (= Stählin 1936; online version page 149; accessed 12 May 2024).
23. On this distinctly Christian moralizing *apatheia* in Clement, see further Merki 1952: 48–52, Weisser 2021: 377–9, and recently Karuhije 2022: 436. More generally on the religious aspects of overcoming fear, see Böhme 2009: 175–7.
24. Translation adapted from Jones 1923: 227, my emphasis. German translation by Hans Diller in Leven 2021: 38: 'Denn der Arzt sieht Schreckliches, berührt Unangenehmes – und erntet aus fremdem Unglück eigenes Leid.'*
25. Elsewhere in the Hippocratic collection, these 'classic five' usually are mentioned together, e.g. in the programmatic passages of *Epid.* 4.43 (5.184 Littré), *Epid.* 6.8.17 (5.350 Littré) and *Vict.* 1.23 (6.496 Littré); see Kazantzidis 2017: 53–5, Holmes 2013: 444–5.
26. Leven 2021: 39: 'Es handelt sich hierbei weniger um den Aspekt der Empathie als um ein Plädoyer für Professionelle Distanz',* without further literature. Kazantzidis 2017: 61–3 reads here, apart from empathy, some evocation of contemporary Greek tragedy; see also Holmes 2010: 235f. Lateiner and Spatharas 2017: 3 declare: '[Medical] professionalism was stronger than laymen's sentiments of aversion toward ill bodies.'*
27. Holmes 2010: 118.
28. Brooke Holmes has defined this as the sole instance of emotional digression within the Hippocratic collection: 'it does lend a note of empathy and emotional investment lacking in other Hippocratic texts'*, Holmes 2013: 445 n. 43.
29. Aristotle, *Part. An.* 1.5 (645a,28–30); trans. Peck 1961: 101, adapted, my emphasis.
30. Kazantzidis 2017: 55 develops a somewhat different interpretation, i.e. that it is Aristotle's only observation that inspection of the body's interior automatically generates this kind of disgust. Furthermore, Kazantzidis elaborates the lexicological differences on disgust between the Aristotelian use of the more patent, visceral '*dyschereía*' and the Hippocratic use of the religious-tainted '*deiná*', whereof I will not discuss here. More on the ancient aspects of disgust see Lateiner and Spatharas 2017; on disgust in biblical literature see Kazen 2017.
31. Like the fictional ghost stories in Phlegon of Tralleis, or the many horrific historical reports in Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon and Diodorus Siculus. On horror in Roman historiography, see now the extensive study by Estèves 2020. On fright and horror as dominant emotions especially in Livy, see Van Gils and Kroon 2022. On medical aspects of horrific monstrous birth reports in non-medical Roman literature, see Graumann 2012.

32. On the paradigmatic nature of the cases in the Hippocratic *Epidemics,* see Graumann and Thumiger 2020.
33. Trans. Smith 1994: 36, adapted.
34. Graumann 2000: 218–19. A comparable case is described in *Epid.* 5.13 (5.212, 11–15 Littré): a woman in Larissa, after heavy vaginal bleeding, had a stillbirth in the tenth month of her pregnancy, 'a child with the right arm attached to its side'* (trans. Smith 1994: 163); see Graumann 2000: 236–7.
35. Holmes 2010: 90 (disembodied agents), 118, 164 (disembodied experts); Holmes 2013: 461 (structural disembodiment of physicians).
36. Kazantzidis 2022: 185 mentions the case of the wife of Hicetas in *Epidemics* 3.1.11 (3.62 Littré), who after a miscarriage developed 'delirium, fears, depression', a 'mother in shock', whereas 'nowhere [throughout the Hippocratic corpus] do the emotions of fear and despondency become explicitly linked to the mother's mourning'.* Kazantzidis warns against overly modern misreadings here, completely leaving aside discussions about medical retrospective diagnosis (in this case puerperal sepsis); see Graumann 2000: 222.
37. For more on animals as ancient anatomical subjects, which also included horses, donkeys, mules, sheep, cats, weasels, mice, bears, wolves, lions, camels, hippopotami and even big elephants ('pool of animals'), see Bubb 2022: 95–110.
38. In Galen's time, learning from the human skeleton was probably acceptable, whereas human dissection was taboo; Bubb 2022: 110–20. On Galen's innovative anatomical experiments, see Gleason 2009, Salas 2020, Bubb 2022, especially 316–48.
39. Galen, *De anatomicis administrationibus (AA, Anatomical Procedures)* IX.11 (trans. Duckworth 1962: 15).
40. Petit 2018: 157 ('avec un frisson d'horreur par les auditeurs et lecteurs de Galien').* Salas 2020: 57 with n. 3, cites Petit and speaks only of 'esthetics of horror', which he fails to discuss further.
41. The original Greek text of Galen is lost, and only the Arabic translation is transmitted, offered here in English translation. One can thus only speculate as to the original Greek for 'unpleasing expression' here.
42. Bubb 2022: 92–3. Imagine gruesome public surgical shows such as the following on an ape: 'I performed many anatomical demonstrations before the spectators: I made an incision in the abdomen of an ape and exposed its intestines . . . then treated the ape displaying our skill'; Galen, *Opt. Med. Cogn.* 9.6–7 (CMG Suppl Or IV 105.4–15 Iskander).
43. On these performances, see now Bubb 2022: 54–90 ('Dissection in the Roman Period').
44. Only rarely, Galen reports of disgusting medical situations, e.g. in *Methodus medendi (MM)* 14.12 (10,985,2–3 K.): '[When such tumors are divided by scalpel] among the fluids [found] in them, there is that which is mire or earth, or slime of oil, or sediment of wine, foul-smelling in such a way as *to disgust everyone*' ('τὸ δ᾽ οὕτω δυσῶδες ὡς **δυσχεραίνειν ἅπαντας**'; translation adapted from Johnston and Horsley, my emphasis).
45. Ditto et al. 2012.
46. McFarling 2019, with impressive pictures.
47. Brown 2019.
48. This can be summarized in the bitter statement of Müller 2020: 213: 'Die emotionale Seite unseres Berufes wird häufig verschwiegen'* (The emotional side of our [medical] profession is often kept silent).
49. Biswas et al. 2019. Although 'triple horror' is medical jargon, this is the first and only medical article with that title known to me; see 'National Library of Medicine', search items 'triple

horror', https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/31464226/ (accessed and last checked on 12 May 2024). Probably, the title 'horror' bears a certain inclination towards tabloid journalism for scientific publishers.

50. For example, a German patient's guidebook (published by the author and patient himself) is titled: Ernst Crameri, *Der Horror: Eingewachsene Zehennägel*. Wertvolle Tipps aus der Praxis, 2010. I treat dozens of young patients every year in my hospital and am currently contributing to produce the first German medical guidelines for ingrown toenails; see https://register.awmf.org/de/leitlinien/detail/013-106 (accessed 12 May 2024).
51. Seneca, *Nat. Quaest.* 6.2.5 (*unguiculi nos et ne totius quidem dolor, sed aliqua ab latere eius scissure conficit*); Galen, *De simplicium medicamentorum facultatibus (SMT)* 10.15 (12,286,8–12 K.); [Galen], *Euporista* 3.152 (14,535,9–13 K.); German translation in Brodersen 2020: 384–5. There is some correlation with the introduction of wearing closed, tight shoes in humans, although I have not yet found any further trace of ingrown toenails in Graeco-Roman sources, e.g. military literature (expected due to soldiers' tight boots).
52. Take a quick, exemplary look at the countless clinical pictures published online using e.g. the search terms 'COVID, ICU ward'.
53. See: https://twitter.com/kathrynhiveyy/status/1330607852524867587/photo/1 (last accessed 12.05.2022, no more available). Her case became known ('went viral') worldwide via press and internet media, e.g. https://www.ctvnews.ca/health/coronavirus/it-s-exhausting-icu-nurse-shares-before-and-after-photos-of-herself-to-show-pandemic-toll-1.5202591 (accessed 12.05.2024), or https://www.newsweek.com/icu-nurse-slams-ignorance-anti-mask-movement-viral-twitter-thread-1626340 (accessed 12.05.2024).
54. Zerbini et al. 2020.
55. See https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1598778/?ref_=fn_al_tt_1 (accessed 12 May 2024).
56. Scrivner et al. 2021. Anz 2019: 169 called this 'relief through media distance' ('Erleichterung bei medialer Distanz').*
57. Anjum is currently a resident in internal medicine; see https://www.omega3pictures.com/about (accessed 12 May 2024). For information on the content and the author of this 9:33 min-long movie and a link to the movie itself (YouTube.com), see https://in-training.org/history-of-present-illness-a-medical-school-short-horror-film-21004 (accessed 12 May 2024). See also https://www.imdb.com/title/tt12716296/?ref_=nm_ov_bio_lk (accessed 12 May 2024).
58. Syrek 2020 (containing an interview with Anjum and, as of 31 October 2022, nearly 200 responses from medical professionals).
59. Celsus, *De Medicina* 3.18.24, trans. W. G. Spencer 1935: 303.
60. Kazantzidis 2017: 58: 'the Hippocratics show a remarkable resilience when it comes to expressing their disgust.'*
61. On this programmatic omission of explicit theory and diagnoses in the Hippocratic *Epidemics*, see generally Graumann 2000.
62. Kazantzidis 2017: 61; 2022: 179: 'This near-total invisibility of the physician's body translates, I would argue, also to the physician's silence when it comes to expressing his *emotions*'* (emphasis original); Kosak 2022: 136–7 (on shame and the medical practitioner); Thumiger 2022: 149 (avoidance of 'iatrogenic emotions'). Holmes 2013: 431, 461 declares this an early and foundational moment of objectivity in ancient medicine. I suspect that this too is an overinterpretation of what the texts offer. Moreover, the case histories in the *Epidemics* in particular represent a filtered reality and their inexplicitness allows for various interpretations, making them contingent; see Graumann 2000: 57–61, 152.

63. Holmes 2013: 463 hints at the long Graeco-Roman philosophical tradition, which I cannot discuss further here.

64. On this ancient discussion, see Weisser 2021. On emotional trauma and possible coping mechanisms in ancient Graeco-Roman non-medical literature, see now the inspiring essay collection in Karanika and Panoussi 2020.

65. '[Einleitung] XVII. Zur Tugend wird Apathie (als Stärke betrachtet) notwendig vorausgesetzt' [for virtue apathy (as power) essentially is presupposed]; see Kant 2017: 43–5 [originally 1797: 408–9]; especially 44 [409]: 'Die wahre Stärke der Tugend ist das Gemüt in Ruhe mit einer überlegten und festen Entschließung, ihr Gesetz in Ausübung zu bringen. Das ist der Zustand der Gesundheit im moralischen Leben.' For further philosophical details here, see Hüning 2019: 71–2.

66. Kant 2017: 84–5 [443]; commentary in Höffe 2019: 140–2. This Kantian statement is today (mis-)used in ethical discussions of animal experiments.

67. E.g. Fabry 2023: 196, in his recent guide to German medical education, still classifies emotions such as shame, guilt and fear as both 'aversive reactions' and 'unpleasant affective experiences', which the expert healthcare professional is able to suppress with 'emotional equanimity'.

68. Kazis 2002; Ringel 2017.

69. Kazis 2002, citing a senior Swiss nurse: 'Da muss jeder letztlich selber schauen, wie er damit zurechtkommt.'*

70. Nelson 2022 still adopts this opinion, but her article produced a long series of contrary commentaries.

71. NT, Mk 6.49-50 [= Mt. 14.26-7]. Translation: King James Version (KJV), adapted; online: https://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/Mark-6-50/ (accessed 12 May 2024). In his study on emotions in the New Testament, Elliott 2005: 249 comments on Mk 6.50: 'Jesus gives those to whom he ministers good reason to take heart.'* Spencer 2017b: 238 mentions in his discussion of faith Mk 6.50 as the only second appearance of the encouraging '*thársos*' in the Gospel of Mark (next to Mk 10.49), and connects it to Aristotle, *Rhet.* 2.5.16 [1383a], where it is included as specific 'antidote to fear' (*phóbos*). In the case of Mk 6, despite Jesus' emotional appeal, the Apostles stay in fearful doubt, because 'their heart was petrified' or emotionally frozen (Mk 6.52, ἀλλ᾽ ἦν αὐτῶν ἡ καρδία πεπωρωμένη). Further on this, see Vegge 2017: 258–61, who equals that freezing with the emotional experience of numbness. I am reading an earlier ancient pattern for this '*thársos*' episode already in Callimachus' *Hecale* (third century BCE): 'When they saw [them], at once they *all trembled*, nor did anyone dare to look at the great man [Theseus] and the horrific beast [the Marathonian bull], until Theseus shouted "**Stay with confidence** and report the good news to my father Aigeus, *relieving* him of many *anxieties*"'; 'ὡς ἴδον, ὧς ἅμα πάντες ὑπέτρεσαν οὐδε τις ἔτλη/ ἄνδρα μέγαν καὶ θῆρα πελώριον ἄντα ἰδέσθαι,/ μέσφ᾽ ὅτε δὴ Θησεύς φιν ἀπόπροθι μακρὸν ἄϋσε·/ "μίμνετε **θαρσήεντες**, ἐμῷ δέ τις Αἰγέϊ πατρί/ νεύμενος ὅς τ᾽ ὤκιστος ἐς ἄστυρον ἀγγελιώτης/ ὧδ᾽ ἐνέποι –πολέων κεν ἀναψύξειε μεριμνέων–"' (fr.69 Hollis, *Suppl.Hell.*288, 260 Pfeiffer, 246 Asper; trans. adapted from Clayman, my emphasis).

72. Following Böhme 2009: 183, this is very much comparable to the infinite historical and poetical narratives – and I may add today movies – about natural disasters such as the biblical deluge, which serve as a 'pattern for the fictive experience of elementary fear' ['ein Tableau für das imaginäre Erleben eigener Elementaremotionen'], or as bluntly put by Böhme: 'Narrating renders nameless fears nameable' ['Durch das Erzählen werden die namenlosen Ängste benennbar'].* I believe that there is already some eternal truth in the similar rational appeal of Seneca, *Nat. Quaest.* 6.3.2: *levius accidunt familiaria, ex insolito*

formido maior est, 'it is much easier to bear the familiar, whereas the unfamiliar causes great fear' ['Was man kennt, trifft nicht so schwer, während bei Ungewohntem die Angst größer ist',* German trans. Schönberger 1998: 335].

73. E.g. see the powerful call for immediate action against Covid-19 pandemic-related psychological harm to clinicians in Dzau et al. 2020. Essays of de-narration of horror effects during medical careers can be found in bestsellers such as Samuel Shem's *House of God* (1978); Adam Kay's *This is Going to Hurt* (2017), which was written as a consequence of the author's PTSD and his complete departure from the medical profession – see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adam_Kay_(writer) (accessed 12 May 2024); Müller (2020), who anonymously (Dr Lieschen Müller = Jane Doe, MD) has written quite emotionally about her frustrating residency in trauma surgery in German hospitals.
74. Representatively, I am only citing here the classic healthcare study on disgust by Ringel from 2000 (now Ringel 2017) and that by Krey 2021 ('Ekel ist okay'), as well as the physician-focused book of Figley, Huggard and Rees 2013. One of the best available guides to professional resilience in medicine is Wicks 2006, now revised following the Covid-19 pandemic (Wicks and Donnelly 2021).
75. For example, on resilience as a major part of healthcare professional identity formation, see Wald 2015.
76. Zimmermann et al. 2020. Although not yet much established in German medical and nursing schools, there are current trials of 'Rooms of Horrors' at university hospitals in Frankfurt (Main) and Gießen.
77. I am currently trying to establish educational units with a focus on 'medical horror' for final-year medical students at the medical faculty in Gießen, with the aim of focusing on this medical stress topic and offering theoretical and practical help to overcome it; a further aim might be to preselect tougher candidates for the difficult surgical career.
78. On the importance of multidimensional learning issues mediated through anatomical dissection courses, see McMenamin et al. 2018, Fabry 2023: 189–91. The internationally applied admission restrictions for medical studies at universities alone result in a certain preselection.
79. Müller 2020: 143 warns against the treacherous self-confidence of experience ('scheinbare Selbstsicherheit der Berufserfahrung') with the classic saying: 'Medicine teaches one to fear very quickly' ('Die Medizin lehrt einem nämlich sehr schnell das Fürchten', my translation).*
80. A general critique of the existence of 'universal emotions' is offered by Feldman Barrett 2017 ('myth of universal emotions'). On the caveats in neuroscientific studies on emotions ('seven sins'), see the short but very useful overview of Davidson 2003.
81. However, I would like to follow the well-balanced opinion of Spencer 2017a: 32: 'we moderns, with due openness and diligent study, can still have a reasonable cross-cultural exchange with our ancient brothers and sisters about emotions, that we can truly, though not fully, sympathize – feel with – them.'*
82. Müller 2020: 132: 'As a doctor, I am of course professional in these situations, but that doesn't mean I am *emotionless*. I feel sadness, anger, despair, compassion, *horror*, and resignation. The daily work teaches me to maintain distance even in such matters' ('Als Ärztin bin [ich] in diesen Situationen natürlich professionell, aber *emotionslos bin ich deshalb nicht*. Ich empfinde Trauer, Wut, Verzweiflung, Mitleid, *Erschrecken*, Resignation. Der Arbeitsalltag lehrt mich, auch in solchen Belangen, Distanz zu wahren',* my emphasis and translation).

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CHAPTER 12

RECIPES FOR HORROR IN GRAECO-ROMAN MAGIC AND MEDICINE

Sean Coughlin

> A certain atmosphere of breathless and unexplainable dread of outer, unknown forces must be present; and there must be a hint, expressed with a seriousness and portentousness becoming its subject, of that most terrible conception of the human brain – a malign and particular suspension or defeat of those fixed laws of Nature which are our only safeguard against the assaults of chaos and the daemons of unplumbed space.
>
> H. P. Lovecraft, 'Supernatural Horror in Literature', *The Recluse*, 1927: 24

Introduction[1]

I am not sure whether any writers in the ancient Mediterranean believed there were 'fixed laws of Nature' as Lovecraft understands them. For many ancient Greek and Roman writers, even philosophers and the doctors historians call 'rational', the natural world was governed by intentional or quasi-intentional forces acting according to their own non-moral impulses. 'The world is full of gods', as Aristotle says.[2] Still, there were practices – call them magic, sorcery, witchcraft, or even medicine – that aimed at persuading daemons or similar forces to carry out the wishes of the person invoking them. If we think of horror as a fear that the paranormal can slip into an otherwise predictable world, then practices like these can be understood as ways of coping with or even exploiting those forces.[3]

The recipes of my chapter's title are those that presume the 'daemons of unplumbed space' and record practical steps and ingredients to protect against them or conjure them up. The steps may involve mixing elixirs, potions and philtres, casting spells, and reciting incantations. The ingredients range from rare and expensive varieties of incense to the disgusting and abject materials of *Dreckapotheke* or filth pharmacy, including blood, urine, faeces, sexual fluids, and parts of animal or human corpses. Such ingredients are commonplaces of supernatural horror today and they are commonplaces of magical and medical writing from Graeco-Roman antiquity. I could only guess at the precise lines of transmission between ancient texts and modern horror literature.[4] The Greek and Egyptian magical papyri studied today were mostly buried until the nineteenth century; and even after they emerged, they remained difficult to access as ancient Egyptian writing systems were still in the process of being deciphered.[5] Still, it seems plausible to me that the formulae they contain are ancestors of the kinds we find described in supernatural horror, from *Macbeth*'s weird sisters' eye of newt to the tannis root charm of *Rosemary's Baby*.

The magical and medical writings of the Graeco-Roman period offer glimpses of how people understood the worlds of magic and the everyday to be related, and some glimpses come not through abstracted magical practice itself, but through stories of different actors' tangible encounters with magic recipes.[6]

In this chapter, I want to explore some of these stories and some of these encounters, casting aside a broader exploration of magic's spiritual and allegorical dimensions to concentrate on the bodily manifestations and experiences elicited by ancient recipes for horror.[7] My focus is on the human and animal body, not merely as something subject to horror, but as a medium and even active participant in the rituals prescribed. The investigation will be framed by two encounters: first, Emperor Hadrian's witnessed exhibition (*epideixis*) of a magical procedure by Pachrates, the high priest of Heliopolis, offering a glimpse into the ritualistic and performative aspects of magical practice; and second, my own encounter with replicating a recipe for myrrh-blood ink, providing a modern perspective on the chemical and sensory dimensions of ancient magic. The aim of the replication is not only to 'experience the past' for its own sake, but serves two additional purposes. First, as scholars are becoming increasingly aware, familiarizing oneself with the material reality behind the text of the recipe provides additional evidence for understanding how it is supposed to work (whether in fact it works or not) and consequently how best to interpret what the text says.[8] Second, as William Tullett has recently argued in his work on sensory studies, by replicating or recreating things similar to what was experienced in the past, we are able to note the ways our experiences and associations differ from those recorded in our sources, and then use the question 'why do these differences exist?' as a starting point for historical reflection.[9] Both approaches offer novel ways of studying recipes for horror not merely as texts but also as records of complex interactions involving the practitioner, ingredients, procedures and victims. Through these encounters, we can discern distinct layers of meaning, fears, and fascination that these recipes embody.

Categorizing recipes

Before moving to the encounters, it will be helpful to have an overview of the categories ancient authors used to order magical practices and recipes, and the easiest way to do this is to begin with an example of the kind of texts we are dealing with:

> Agathokles' dream-sending procedure: Take a completely black cat that died a violent death, fashion a strip of papyrus and inscribe on it with myrrh the following things and the [name of the] person to whom you want to send a dream, and place it into the mouth of the cat.
>
> ὀνειροπομ̣[πὸ]ς Ἀγαθοκλεύς. λαβὼν αἴλουρον ὁλομέλανα βιοθ[άν]α̣τον, π[ο]ιήσας πιττάκιον καὶ ἐνγράψας ζ̅ζ̅ τὰ ὑποκείμενα καὶ ὃν θέλεις ὀν[ειροπ]ομπε̣ῖσαι καὶ ἔνθες εἰς τὸ στόμα τοῦ αἰλούρου.
>
> GEMF *15 156–8* = PGM *XII 107–9 = 84,1–3 FTT,*
> *tr. Dieleman, Sarischouli et al.*

The rite described here would not seem out of place in a tale of supernatural horror. The dream-sending procedure is attributed to a mysterious and otherwise-unknown Agathokles, whose attribution gives the procedure authority and credibility. Many of the elements in his procedure – the black cat, a violent death, magic ink, manipulation of corpses – are common in the genre of supernatural horror. A series of *voces magicae* or magic words, another familiar element, immediately follows the quotation. These are meant to invoke gods and demons, who are then commanded to send whatever information one wants to whatever addressee one wishes through a dream.

The papyrus transmitting this recipe, Leiden I 384, first came to the attention of European scholars in 1828; given its recent reception, therefore, it is remarkable how familiar its elements seem.[10] Of course, whenever an ancient text seems familiar, we should keep in mind that it may be because we are reading our own modern expectations into the text. There are however *prima facie* reasons for thinking that the recipes share a family resemblance with the genre of supernatural horror, for there is something akin to Lovecraft's dread in many of the recipes we find in the Greek and Egyptian formularies. For example, written on the same papyrus, we find the following incantation:

> Come to me, lord of forms, and awaken men and women for me; compel them by your everstrong and mighty power to do all the things that are both written and spoken by me. EISAPHSANTA PHOUREI ARNAI· . . . SUNPHREŌ RIŌBAI OSOI, you are (?) ATEPHTHO AŌREL ADŌNAI. Fill them with terror and trembling, flutter their minds with fear of you, and do to him, NN, all the things that have been prescribed.[11]
>
> ἧ̣καί μοι ὁ δεσπότης τῶν μορφῶν καὶ δειέγειρόν μοι ἄνδρας καὶ γυναῖκας, ἀνάγκασον αὐτοὺς ποιῆσαι τῇ̣ σαει εἰσχυρᾷ̣ καὶ κρατα δυνάμ̣ι πάντα τὰ ὕπ᾽ ἐμοῦ γραφόμενά τε καὶ λεγόμενα. εισαφσαντα φουρει αρναι·̣ ̣ σ̣υνφρεω ριωβαι ο̣σοι συ̤ ατεφθο αω̣ρε̣λ Αδωναι. καὶ ποίησον αὐτοὺς ἐνφόβους, ἰντρόμους, ἐπτοημένους τὰς φρένας ποι̣ σ̤ σ̣ας διὰ τὸν φόβον σου καὶ ποίει τῷ Δ̣ ἅπαντα τὰ προγεγραμμένα.
>
> GEMF *15 99–104* = PGM *XII 51–5 = 76,11–16 FTT,*
> *tr. Dieleman, Sarischouli et al.*

The incantation, addressed to the god Eros, is part of a larger procedure for invoking the god as an attendant (*paredros,* πάρεδρος), an entity at least superficially similar to a familiar spirit.[12] The more important similarity, however, is how the scene is described. The attendant is invoked in order to coerce a victim to do something. The means of coercion are terror and fear. The attendant brings about *enphobos* (ἔνφοβος), a state of fear (the term is only found in magical texts); *entromos* (ἴν-, ἔντρομος), a state of trembling; and *eptoēmenos tēn phrena* (ἐπτοημένος τὴν φρένα), a fluttering or terrifying of the mind *dia ton phobon sou* (διὰ τὸν φόβον σου), 'through fear of you', i.e. the god.[13] To these, one could add similar states and emotions, like *phrikē* (φρίκη), the shuddering of the body, mentioned in other procedures.[14] The supernatural attendant, therefore, is portrayed in the procedure as an object and cause of fear and dread.

There are many kinds of procedures that involve the appeal to such forces. There are general terms for them, such as spells (*epilogoi*, ἐπίλογοι,), formulae (*logoi*, λόγοι), incantations (*epōidai,* ἐπῳδαί), rites (*teletē*, τελεταί) and potions (*posima*, *potēria*; πόσιμα, ποτήρια); and there are specific terms for specific procedures: bindings (*katadesmoi*, κατάδεσμοι), attraction producers (*agōgai, agōgima;* ἀγωγαί, ἀγώγιμα), dream-senders (*oneiropompoi*, ὀνειροπομποί), sleeplessness-producers (*agrupnētika*, ἀγρυπνητικά), invisibility procedures (*amaurōseis*, ἀμαυρώσεις), love charms (*philtra;* φίλτρα), love-bindings (*philtrokatadesmoi*, φιλτροκατάδεσμοι), *iunx* or *jinx* (ἴυγξ) for attraction,[15] inflaming procedures (*empura,* ἔμπυρα), charisma procedures (*charitēsia*, χαριτήσια), procedures to produce discord between people (*diakopoi*, διακοποί), procedures for restraining someone's anger (*thumokatokha,* θυμοκάτοχα), spells using slander against a divinity or demon (*diabolai,* διαβολαί), and phylacteries (*phylaktēria,* φυλακτήρια), procedures for protection from others' magic or from gods and demons. This list is only a selection but, as we will see, it corresponds well with what we find in literary and documentary sources contemporary to the magical papyri, and will be helpful for understanding what follows.

Encounter I: The Imperial Audience at Heliopolis (*GEMF* 57 = *PGM* IV 2441–620)

The Recipe

> Attraction procedure (*agōgē*). Equipment for a lunar burnt offering. It attracts those who are uncontrollable and without the use of magical material on the same day; it inflicts sickness excellently and destroys powerfully, sends dreams beautifully, accomplishes dream revelations marvellously and in its many demonstrations has been marvelled at for having no failure in these matters.
>
> Burnt Offering. Exhibited by Pachrates, the high priest of Heliopolis, who exhibited the power of his divine magic to the Emperor Hadrian. It attracted in one hour, made sick in two hours, destroyed in seven hours, and it sent dreams to the emperor himself when he was testing the complete truth of his divine magic. He was so amazed at the high priest, that he ordered twice the pay to be given to him.
>
> Ἀγωγή· σκευὴ ἐπιθύματος σεληνιακοῦ ἄγουσα ἀσχέτους καὶ ἀνουσιάστους μονοημέρους, κατακλίνει γενναίως καὶ ἀναιρεῖ ἰσχυρῶς, ὀνειροπομπεῖ καλλίστως, ὀνειραιτητεῖ θαυμαστῶς καὶ ἐν πλείσταις ἀποδείξεσιν ἐθαυμάσθη οὐδεμίαν ἔγκλισιν ἔχουσα τούτων.
>
> ἐπίθυμα· ἐπεδείξατο Παχράτης, ὁ προφήτης Ἡλιουπόλεως, Ἀδριανῷ βασιλεῖ ἐπιδεικνύμενος τὴν δύναμιν τῆς θείας αὐτοῦ μαγείας. ἦξεν γὰρ μονόωρον, κατέκλινεν ἐν ὥραις β̄, ἀνεῖλεν ἐν ὥραις ζ̄, ὀνειροπόμπησεν δὲ αὐτὸν βασιλέα ἐκδοκιμάζοντος αὐτοῦ τὴν ὅλην ἀλήθειαν τῆς περὶ αὐτὸν μαγείας· καὶ θαυμάσας τὸν προφήτην διπλᾶ ὀψώνια αὐτῷ ἐκέλευσεν δίδοσθαι.
>
> GEMF *57* = PGM *IV 2441–55 = 82–3 Betz, tr. O'Neil, modified*

While nearly any of the recipes in the *Greek and Egyptian Magical Formularies* would be at home in a paper on horror, this procedure from *GEMF* 57 ('The Paris Magical Codex') is interesting in terms of its complexity, its parallels in other procedures, and its performative aspect.[16] It is an attraction procedure (*agōgē*, ἀγωγή) that combines a burnt incense offering (*epithuma*, ἐπίθυμα), followed by a slander spell (*diabolē,* διαβολή) addressing the lunar goddess Selene,[17] then by a protection spell or phylactery (*phulaktērion,* φυλακτήριον), and finally some further incantations to Selene. It is one of two attraction procedures in the Paris codex that involve a slander spell addressing Selene (or Selene-Hecate-Artemis-Aphrodite). The other follows immediately after (at *GEMF* 57 = *PGM* IV 2618–705), with spells to Selene that differ only slightly in phrasing and a phylactery and incense offering that differs more noticeably.

The text begins with a statement of what the procedure is for, but it does not say who the victim is. In the opening statement, it says the procedure attracts a victim, inflicts illness, and kills (along with some dream sending and prophecy). Only later do we learn a woman is meant, when the victim is introduced as 'she so-and-so'.[18] She is brought to the practitioner when he informs the goddess that this woman has slandered her and desecrated her mysteries, and then suggests to the goddess to send her to him so he can punish her.

A staging of erotic horror

I begin with the opening lines of the procedure as well as one of its incantations as an instance of a recipe that is a cause of horror. I will then go on to discuss its phylactery as a cause of horror prevention, and then to its burnt offering of filthy materials as an instance of horror itself.

The procedure is unique in beginning with a story of its use. The story describes an occasion when the procedure was used in the context of an *epideixis* (ἐπίδειξις), a word that means 'exhibition' or 'display', the kind of thing one does to make something manifest to others. Such a story recalls a long tradition going back at least to the middle Kingdom (beginning in the 2000s BCE) of sorcerers or priests being asked by the king or pharaoh to prove their skill through a public display.[19] One example comes from the Westcar papyrus (P. Berlin 3033, *c.* 1600s BCE), where Djedi, a commoner and magician, is asked by king Khufu (Cheops) to display his ability to tame wild animals and reattach heads that have been severed from their bodies.[20] In a second-century CE Greek-speaking context, however, *epideixis* also has a technical sense, referring to public speeches associated with the orators of the Second Sophistic. The sophists of this period are known for composing and performing set-speeches to display their rhetorical virtuosity to audiences that would include respected members of society. We can see a parallel in Pachrates' case, whose *epideixis* was for the Emperor Hadrian. Like in the early Egyptian tradition, however, what is on display is not a rhetorical speech, but the magic of a practitioner. Since magic is not something that can be made apparent in itself, it must be made manifest through a medium or victim, in this case the woman who serves as proof of the magic's power. *Epideixis,* therefore, here implies both the public spectacle and the effects of magic on the body of the victim as is its main event.

According to the author, the *epideixis* was conducted by Pachrates, the *prophetēs* or high priest of Heliopolis.[21] It seems likely that no such event took place. Still, it is worth imagining it did in order to consider the reasons why someone might have written a story as if it did. Like the dream-sender of Agathokles discussed earlier, this attraction procedure, specifically the *epithuma* or incense offering, is attributed to an expert and authority.[22] One would rightly be tempted to think this is done to give the recipe credibility, but this is only part of what is going on. Unlike the reference to Agathokles in the previous procedure, in this case, what seems most important is not the authority of the practitioner, but the fact that the procedure was proven by a thorough test (*ekdokimeion,* ἐκδοκιμεῖον). The credibility of the procedure therefore does not derive solely from Pachrates' authority, but primarily from its being tested and proven.

There are at least two ways we might understand the relation of Pachrates' *epideixis* to the kind of testing prompted by Hadrian's audience. One way, recently suggested by Radcliffe Edmonds III, is to consider that Hadrian's 'test' consists in Pachrates teaching him how to perform the procedure and the story is recounting Hadrian's own use of the magic spells. On this view, it is the success of Pachrates' magic in the hands of someone from 'outside the temple gates' that is a sign of its power.[23] Hadrian, meanwhile, would be being portrayed as another civic leader with an interest in violent magic, like Cleopatra VII, who is associated with *iunx* procedures, or Attalus III, king of Pergamum (ruled 138–133 BCE) and Mithridates VI Eupator, king of Pontus (ruled 123–63 BCE), who are reported to have tested magic and poisons on criminals sentenced to death.[24] Yet, for reasons that will become clear, it seems unlikely to me that this text suggests Hadrian carried out any procedures himself.

A second possibility is to consider the relation between Pachrates *epideixis* and the emperor's request for proof along the lines of the earlier Egyptian tradition, where a magician exhibits their expertise to the civic leader. Support for this reading comes from the text itself: Pachrates is said to have sent dreams to the emperor, rather than the emperor sending them to himself, and so we can suppose that Pachrates carried out the other procedures as well.

More telling evidence, however, comes from parallels in contemporary sources where *epideixis* as public performance is portrayed as a means of giving proof and establishing reputation. One such source is Galen of Pergamum, a rationalist doctor and medical writer who lived in the second half of the second century CE and so is contemporary with Pachrates and Hadrian. Galen is a notoriously shameless boaster and polemicist. While this often makes him frustrating to read, it also means we have reports from his own hand of the medical and anatomical procedures that he performed in public. The way he refers to these performances is as *epideixeis.* Claire Bubb, Luis Salas and Heinrich von Staden have argued that Galen's use of *epideixis* and related terms suggests he is thinking of his performances as similar theatre or a public speech.[25] As von Staden puts it, Galen 'evocatively inscribes his public anatomical exhibitions in a tradition of theatrical rhetorical virtuosity with which his audiences were thoroughly familiar'.*[26] So, for example, in his work *On My Own Books,* he talks about how his friends compelled him to return to performing dissections of animals for public audiences. The reason, he says, is so that he could show (*epideixōn*, ἐπιδείξων) through the dissection that he had not falsified anything (*emauton ouden epseusmenon,* ἐμαυτὸν οὐδὲν ἐψευσμένον) in his anatomical writings – a performance he says that went on for days.[27] He would ask his audience (often from among the city's intellectuals and politicians) to pick an anatomical detail they would like to see from a competing anatomist's book. For each choice, he would show the existence of the structures he wrote about and their functions. He would dissect the animal body (goats or pigs, often alive), show the structure, and in doing so establish the superiority and truth of his own anatomical writings.[28] *Epideixis,* therefore, has a meaning beyond the familiar one of performing a set speech at this period. It includes a public 'showing' of the truth of one's knowledge to settle the status of one's expertise. Since the knowledge is about anatomy, a written treatise is not sufficient to give it credibility. Like in Pachrates' case, it also needs to be manifested through the body of the victim.

The second contemporary source is Lucian. The last story in Lucian's *Philopseudes* is the inspiration for Goethe's *Der Zauberlehrling* and Disney's *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*.[29] It is about an Egyptian holy man (*anēr hieros,* ἀνὴρ ἱερός) in Memphis: clean shaven, imperfect Greek (*ou katharōs hellēnizonta,* οὐ καθαρῶς ἑλληνίζοντα), but wonderfully wise with a complete Egyptian education (*thaumasios tēn sophian kai tēn paideian eidōs tēn Aigyption*, θαυμάσιος τὴν σοφίαν καὶ τὴν παιδείαν πᾶσαν εἰδὼς τὴν Αἰγύπτιον).[30] His name is Pancrates (Παγκράτης), which means, 'All Powerful', but which some scholars point out is only a slight variation in the Hellenization of 'Pachrates' from the Paris codex.[31] In Lucian's story, the characters tell how they became Pancrates' students after they saw him perform (*ergazesthai*, ἐργάζεσθαι) many marvellous things (*polla terastia,* πολλὰ τεράστια), including riding on crocodiles, swimming with other animals (like Djedi in the story of Khufu from the Westcar papyrus), and turning brooms, pestles and other things around the house into servants and attendants.[32] While Lucian does not explicitly call the performance an *epideixis*, it is still something witnessed by the public, and it is its marvellous character that leads the story's protagonist to become his student. The procedure, however, is not something foolproof that can be done even by someone from 'outside the temple walls.' Famously, the point of the story is his student's inability: he cannot turn off the spell once he has turned the pestles (or broomsticks in Disney's version) into servants.

Therefore, parallels in both Galen and Lucian suggest a context where *epideixeis* are public displays. In Galen, such displays are means of proving the practitioner's skill, while in Lucian, even if not called *epideixeis* directly, public performance is a means of establishing authority. Likewise with Pachrates' burnt offering, the public exhibition is meant to prove the procedure works.

While it seems more likely to me that the text implies the proof was performed by Pachrates, even if it were Hadrian, the dream sending is only one part of the procedure. The main part involves acts against the body of the victim: attracting her, causing her illness, and causing her death. We are even given specific details of this. On this occasion, it attracted the victim in one hour, made her sick in two, and destroyed her in seven. The details may seem artificial. An increase in the time of the procedure corresponding to an increase in the intensity (from attraction to death) is paralleled in, for example, a Demotic procedure in *GEMF* 16 for a similar effect. This recipe says one must stand over the severed head of a donkey, anoint one’s hands and mouth with donkey blood, and recite spells for four days to make the victim sick, seven to make them die.[33] Pachrates’ procedure is conveniently quicker, which helps to make the performative aspect more plausible. Yet, regardless of how common the idea is of a proportion of time to intensity, the procedure manifests in the body of the victim. There is no mention that any supernatural being appears or indeed that there is any other manifest proof that the procedure works. There is Pachrates, with his special recipe for a burnt offering, and there is the victim’s body, as proof that it is effective.

The centrality of the body is implied by the hymn to Selene (here also called Aktiōphis, origin unknown), which describes the effect that Pachrates’ audience would have witnessed:

> Spell: ‘Let all the darkness of clouds be dispersed for me, and let the goddess Aktiōphis shine for me, and let her hear my holy voice. For I come announcing the slander of NN, a defiled and unholy woman, for she has slandered your holy mysteries to the knowledge of people. She, NN, is the one, [not] I, who says, “I have seen the greatest goddess, after leaving the heavenly vault, on earth without sandals, sword in hand, and [speaking] a foul name.” It is she, NN, who said, “I saw [the goddess] drinking blood.” She, NN, said it, not I, AKTIŌPHIS ERESCHIGAL NEBOUTOSOUALĒTH PHORPHORBA SATRAPAMMŌN CHOIRIXIĒ, FLESHEATER. Go to her NN and take away her sleep and put a burning heat in her soul, torment and stinging in her heart, and banish her from every place and from every house, and attract her here to me, NN.’ . . . After saying these things, sacrifice. Then raise loud groans and go backward as you descend. And she will at come at once. But pay attention to the one being attracted, so that you may open the door for her; otherwise the spell will fail.
>
> λόγος· «διασταλήτω μοι πᾶσα νεφῶν σκοτία, καὶ ἐπιλαμψάτω μοι ἡ θεὸς Ἀκτιῶφις καὶ ἀκουσάτω μου τῆς ἱερᾶς φωνῆς·ωνῆίνω γὰρ καταγγέλλων τὴν διαβολὴν τῆς μιαρᾶς καὶ ἀνοσίας, τῆς δεῖνα· διέβαλεν γάρ σου τὰ ἱερὰ μυστήρια ἀνθρώποις εἰς γνῶσιν. ἡ δεῖνά ἐστιν ἡ εἰποῦσα ὅτι – <οὐκ> ἐγώ εἰμι εἰποῦσα ὅτι· ‘ἐγὼ ἴδον τὴν μεγίστην θεὸν καταλιποῦσαν τὸν πόλον τὸν οὐράνιον, ἐπὶ γῆς γυμνοσάνδαλον, ξιφηφόρον, ἄτοπον ὄνομα <ὀνομά>σασαν.’ ἡ δεῖνά ἐστιν ἡ εἰποῦσα· ‘ἐγὼ τὴν θεὸν αἶμα πίνουσαν.’ ἡ δεῖνα εἶπεν, οὐκ ἐγώ, ΑΚΤΙΩΦΙ ΕΡΕΣΧΙΓΑΛ ΝΕΒΟΥΤΟΣΟΥΑΛΗΘ· ΦΟΡΦΟΡΒΑ· ΣΑΤΡΑΠΑΜΜΩΝ. ΧΟΙΡΙΞΙΗ· ΣΑΡΚΟΒΟΡΑ· βάδισον πρὸς τὴν δεῖνα καὶ βάσταξον αὐτῆς τὸν ὕπνον καὶ δὸς αὐτῇ καῦσιν ψυχῆς, κόλασιν φρενῶν καὶ παροίστρησιν, καὶ ἐκδιώξασα αὐτὴν ἀπὸ παντὸς τόπου καὶ πάσης οἰκίας ἄξον αὐτὴν ὧδε, πρὸς ἐμέ, τὸν δεῖνα.» . . . ἐπὶ δὲ ἀναιρέσεως λέγε· «ἀνάσπασον αὐτῆς τὸ πνεῦμα, κυρία, τῶν μυκτήρων τῆς δεῖνα.»
>
> GEMF *57* = PGM *IV 2471–99 = 83 Betz, tr. O’Neil, modified*

The spell begins by addressing the Aktiōphis/Selene and then informing her that she has been slandered by the victim through the desecration of her mysteries.[34] Another series of epithets follows, and then the deity is asked to afflict the victim and lead her to the performer, presumably to be punished. What follows are familiar elements in erotic spells of attraction (*agōgai*).[35] The victim is coerced from her house through discomfort, confusion, and erotic madness; her sleep is taken away through an insomnia procedure (*agrypnētikon*, ἀγρυπνητικόν); a burning is caused in her soul (*kausin psychēs,* καῦσιν ψυχῆς) with something like an inflaming procedure (*empyron,* ἔμπυρον); an incense offering is made, which Faraone suggests could be an example of sympathetic causation, the burning incense causing a sympathetic burning in the soul, the torture of which will cause her to leave her house.[36] Imagery of erotic torture continues with the 'torment and stinging of the heart (*kolasin phrenōn kai paroistrēsin*, κόλασιν φρενῶν καὶ παροίστρησιν). 'Stinging' here translates *paroistrēsis* (παροίστρησις), which is both connected to what the gadfly (*oistros,* οἶστρος) does, but is also a general term for frenzy, especially mating-related, hence 'oestrus', 'to be in heat'.[37] It is, therefore, an erotic kind of pain that is being afflicted. The erotic torture of the victim is followed by a spell for causing sickness, and finally one that kills her by taking away her breath (*pneuma*, πνεῦμα).

Erotic torture and murder follow the recitation of the slander spell and we should expect that this series of events is part of Pachrates' *epideixis* to the emperor. The victim's body takes the place of the goat or pig in Galen's anatomical dissections, but she is even more the centre of the performance: in Galen's case, the anatomist himself is at work, while in Pachrates' exhibition, the agent, the deity, is invisible. The victim's torment is also primarily bodily. While her soul and heart are afflicted, there seems to be no dualistic assumption of material body and immaterial soul. As Faraone points out, the process of even psychic torture is vividly described in terms of bodily discomforts: sleeplessness, burning, tormenting, stinging.[38] A further bodily element is the physical act of performing the ritual, which is the sympathetic act required for the supernatural to bring about its bodily effects. The ritual and its offering are necessary intermediaries between the unseen forces and the effects on the victim, where the operations, especially the burning of incense, mirror the victim's psychic torment. Even such a condensed passage, therefore, tells us that emperor Hadrian's encounter with Pachrates' magic would have consisted in the physical expression of communion with the supernatural and the bodily expression of psychic torment.

Guarding the body from demonic horrors

The next part of Pachrates' procedure consists in a phylactery, or rite of protection against harm – in this case from Selene, the goddess being invoked:

> [The rite] also possesses a protective charm against your falling, for the goddess is accustomed to make airborne those who perform this rite unprotected by a charm and to hurl them from aloft down to the ground. So consequently I have also

> thought it necessary to take the precaution of a protective charm so that you may perform the rite without hesitation. Keep it secret. Take a hieratic papyrus roll and wear it around your right arm with which you make the offering. And these are the things written on it: 'MOULATHI CHERNOUTH AMARO MOULIANDRON, guard me from every evil daimon, whether an evil male or female.' Keep it secret, son.
>
> ἔχει δὲ φυλακτήριον πρὸς τὸ μή σε καταπεσεῖν· σεἴωθεν γὰρ ἡ θεὸς τοὺς ἀφυλακτηριαστοὺς τοῦτο πράσσοντας ἀεροφ<ερ>εῖς ποιεῖν καὶ ἀπὸ τοῦ ὕψους ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν ῥῖψαι. διὸ οὖν ἀναγκαῖον ἡγησάμην καὶ τοῦ φυλακτηρίου τὴν πρόνοιαν ποιήσασθαι, ὅπως ἀδιστάκτως πράσσῃς. κρύβε. λαβὼν ἱερατικὸν κόλλημα φόρει περὶ τὸν δεξιὸν βραχίονά σου, ἐν ᾧ ἐπιθύσεις. ἔστι δὲ τὰ γραφόμενα ταῦτα· 'ΜΟΥΛΑΘΙ· ΧΕΡΝΟΥΘ· ΑΜΑΡΩ· ΜΟΥΛΙΑΝΔΡΟΝ· διαφύλαξόν με ἀπὸ πονηροῦ παντὸς δαίμονος, ἤτοι ἀρσενικοῦ πονηροῦ ἢ θηλυκοῦ.' κρύβε, υἱέ.
>
> GEMF *57 = PGM IV 2505–19 = Betz 84, tr. O'Neil, modified*

The victim's body is not the only place in which supernatural horror manifests; the practitioner's body, too, is a potential site. In the case of our spell, the procedure needs to be carried out on a roof, perhaps not the safest place, as the author warns us that the goddess is known to throw people into the air if she is unhappy. One needs, therefore, a recipe for protection.

As with the attraction procedure, the phylactery or protection procedure that accompanies it assumes the daemons of unplumbed space can penetrate the normal workings of the world. It likewise uses a physical act to influence those forces. However, the line between 'supernatural' and 'natural' (or 'spiritual' and 'bodily') becomes blurrier than in the case of the erotic attraction spell, as the danger threatened by the spiritual Aktiōphis/Selene is unquestionably bodily. With the attraction procedure, the torture was of the soul and heart, even if expressed in bodily terms, while the illness and death could be conceived of as in some sense spiritual. At least, there is no brutal violence to the body suggested. The phylactery, by contrast, prevents the body from being tossed through the air and broken on the ground. The corporeality of the violence here is much more pronounced.

The knowledge is likewise made to be more embodied. The text emphasizes that this knowledge must be kept secret. Nevertheless, for the knowledge to be effective, the magic words or names mentioned by the procedure cannot merely be uttered. They must be inscribed on the appropriate support. The precise support may vary from procedure to procedure. In this case, the magic words are inscribed on a piece of sacred papyrus, but phylacteries could be made from many materials, such as stone amulets or metal lamella.[39] Whatever the symbolic or ritualistic meaning, they are tangible artefacts, which, like the danger itself, suggests an embodiment of hidden magical power.

A further aspect of the phylactery's embodiment comes from the fact that they must be worn to provide protection. Scholars of Greek, Egyptian and Roman magic note two ways such phylacteries are thought to work, by similarity and sympathy of difference and antipathy. The phylactery provides protection by marking the body of the wearer with certain sacred and secret qualities. In sympathetic cases, these are qualities like those of the divine entity being called upon, in which protection is afforded through the divine's sympathy with the practitioner. In antipathetic cases, the qualities are opposite or hostile to the divine entity, and so able to frighten it into subjugation.[40] In either case, the phylactery is a medium through which the practitioner's privileged access to secret knowledge is made corporeal and hence manifest to the divine.

'Fat of a spotted virgin goat, faeces of a dog-faced baboon': Horrific recipes

The final section of the procedure I want to look at is the *epithuma* or incense offering of Pachrates itself. It presents a further element of bodily horror, a horror in itself, and it is helpful to survey some of the ways such recipes and their materials are reported to have been encountered.

> Take a field-mouse that's been made divine with spring water; and take two moon beetles made divine with river water, a river crab, the fat of a spotted virgin goat, faeces of a dog-faced baboon, two ibis' eggs, two drachms of styrax, two drachms of myrrh, two drachms of saffron, four drachms of Italian cyperus, four drachms of uncut frankincense, a single onion.
>
> Throw all these into a mortar with the field-mouse and the rest, and having ground them up well, keep them ready for use by storing them in a lead box. And whenever you want to perform [sc. the magic rite], take a little bit, light a coal, climb up on the roof, and burn the offering while saying this spell as [the moon] is rising, and immediately she[41] will come.
>
> λαβὼν μυγαλὸν ἐκθέωσον πηγαίῳ ὕδατι καὶ λαβὼν κανθάρους σεληνιακοὺς δύο ἐκθέωσον ὕδατι ποταμίῳ καὶ καρκίνον ποτάμιον καὶ στῆρ ποικίλης αἰγὸς παρθένου καὶ κυνοκεφάλου κόπρον, ἴβεως ᾠὰ δύο, στύρακος δραχμὰς β′, ζμύρνης δραχμὰς β′, κρόκου δραχμὰς β′, κυπέρεως Ἰταλικῆς δραχμὰς δ′, λιβάνου ἀτμήτου δραχμὰς δ′, μονογενὲς κρόμμυον·
> ταῦτα πάντα βάλε εἰς ὅλμον σὺν τῷ μυγαλῷ καὶ τοῖς λοιποῖς καὶ κόψας καλλίστως ἔχε ἐπὶ τῶν χρειῶν ἀποθέμενος εἰς πυξίδα μολιβῆν. καὶ ὅταν βούλῃ πράττειν, ἀνελόμενος ὀλίγον καὶ ποιήσας ἀνθρακιὰν ἀναβὰς ἐπὶ δώματος ὑψηλοῦ ἐπίθυε λέγων τὸν λόγον τοῦτον ἀνατολῆς οὔσης, καὶ παραχρῆμα ἥξει.
>
> GEMF *57* = PGM *IV 2455–71 = 83 Betz, tr. O'Neil, modified*

The recipe involves 'deifying' animals (a process that in practice means drowning them), grinding them up along with faeces and aromatic resins, and burning them on a coal to conjure Selene. As mentioned earlier, it is the element of the procedure attributed directly to Pachrates, and the kinds of materials it lists are also some of the most familiar from supernatural horror.

It is clear from the recipe that there are two broad classes of ingredients, vegetal and animal. Among the vegetal ingredients are pleasant-smelling materials like styrax, myrrh, saffron and frankincense, all widely attested in Egyptian temple worship, particularly in ointments for statuary, and along with saffron commonly used in the magical formularies for the consecration of ritual objects.[42] The other ingredients are the more familiar, unpleasant kinds one might expect from supernatural horror. These are the dead animal parts, the insects, the bodily fluids and waste products. They resemble the *Dreckapotheke* or 'filth pharmacy' frequent in ancient Graeco-Roman pharmacology and medicine, including materials like blood, faeces, urine, semen and menstrual blood derived from humans and other larger animals, as well as various parts of smaller ones.[43] Sometimes, animals are 'made divine', i.e. drowned, for the purpose, while other times the procedure calls for animals or humans specified to have died in a certain way, usually violently. Such ingredients are common in recipes in the formularies. A Demotic recipe for a potion, for example, includes shavings from the head of a dead man, blood of a tick of a black dog, blood from your second and little finger, and your semen, along with some wine.[44] There are recipes with parts of cats, fingernails, donkey blood, milk in which falcons have been drowned, shell of crocodile eggs – it is a long list.[45] Occasionally these names may be code or *Decknamen* (code names) for other, often less disgusting materials.[46] The famous list of *hermēneumata* (ἑρμηνεύματα) or interpretations of names in P. Leiden I 384 are said to have been used to prevent the masses from knowing the true identity of the magical materials.[47] In this list, the filthy names are often code for plants or minerals, as crocodile dung is said to mean Ethiopian soil, or human bile is said to mean malt juice.[48] However, sometimes the materials are not so different from the code names. Lion's semen, for example, is interpreted as human semen, while blood of a baboon is said to be blood of a spotted gecko.[49]

Pachrates' recipe is different from the parallel later in the text because it combines both kinds of ingredients, the pleasant and the unpleasant. In the parallel recipe, the materials are divided into beneficent (*agathopoion*, ἀγαθοποιόν) and coercive (*anankastikon*, ἀναγκαστικόν) offerings. The beneficent is to be burnt for two days and accompanied by a hymn to Selene. It includes the vegetal and aromatic incense compounds, which are mostly different from what we find in Pachrates: uncut frankincense, bay, myrtle, pyrēn, raisins, malabathron, costus.[50] These would be mostly pleasant-smelling. The coercive offering on the other hand consists of the animal materials, mostly the same in both versions, but which in the second version are to be combined and burned on the third day with a coercive spell, claiming that the victim has slandered the deity. Pachrates' recipe differs not only in the vegetal and aromatic ingredients, but in mixing all the ingredients together.

The encounter with Pachrates' recipe for the burnt offering is presented in the hymn. It is described primarily in terms of the smell of a desecrated offering to the goddess Selene.[51] In fact, while the various *Dreckapotheke* of the magical formularies can have many magical (and allegorical, or even medical) meanings, the primary function of this procedure is to suggest that someone is offering material with the purpose of offending Selene. A third, coercive spell (*epanankos logos*, ἐπάναγκος λόγος) accompanying the offering – used after the initial spell discussed earlier – offers a description of the scene that is embodied in the incense offering of Pachrates:

> She, NN, is burning for you, goddess, some dreadful incense, and dappled goat's fat, blood and filth, the menstrual flow of virgin dead, heart of one untimely dead, the magical material of dead dog, woman's embryo, fine-ground wheat husks, sour refuse, salt, fat of dead dog, and mastic, and myrtle, dark bay, barley, and crab claws, sage, rose, fruit pits and a single onion, garlic, fig meal, a dog-faced baboon's dung, and egg of a young ibis. And this is sacrilege! She placed them on your altar; she set the flaming fire to juniper wood strips and slays a seahawk for you, a vulture, and a mouse, your greatest myst'ry, goddess.
>
> ἡ δεῖνά σοι θύει, θεά, δεινόν τι θυμίασμα· αἰγός τε ποικίλης στέαρ καὶ αἷμα καὶ μύσαγμα, ἰχῶρα παρθένου νεκρᾶς καὶ καρδίαν ἀώρου καὶ οὐσίαν νεκροῦ κυνὸς καὶ ἔμβρυον γυναικὸς καὶ λεπτὰ πίτυρα τῶν πυρῶν καὶ λύματα ὀξυόεντα, ἅλα, στέαρ ἐλάφου νεκρᾶς σχῖνόν <τε> μυρσίνην τε, δάφνην ἄτεφρον, ἄλφιτα καὶ καρκίνοιο χηλάς, σφάγνον, ῥόδα, πυρῆνά τε καὶ κρόμμυον τὸ μόνον, σκόρδον τε, σύκων ἄλφιτον, κόπρον κυνοκεφάλοιο ᾠόν τε ἴβεως νεᾶς – ἃ μὴ θέμις – τοῖς σοῖς ἔθηκε βωμοῖς, ξύλοις τε τοῖς ἀρκευθίνοις φλόγας πυρὸς βαλοῦσα ἱέρακα τὸν πελαγοδρόμον καὶ γῦπά σοι σφαγιάζει καὶ μυγαλόν, τὸ σόν, θεά, μυστήριον μέγιστον.
>
> GEMF *57* = PGM *IV 2574–92 = 86 Betz, tr. O'Neil*

It is tempting to think that, in Pachrates' case, the defiled offering is mixed with the vegetal aromatic offering to make the desecration more convincing. Still, the reason some of the ingredients are offensive to the goddess, and hence the reason for the selection of ingredients, is not entirely clear. It is possible, as Ager has recently argued, that the unpleasantness of the scent may be behind the selection, the scent of materials like faeces being considered disgusting and offensive in contrast to the scent of aromatic offerings.[52] There may, however, also be structural reasons and symbolic associations, like sympathies and antipathies, behind the selection. Jørgensen has pointed out parallels in early Egyptian mythological texts where baboons are offered to Selene.[53] Bortolani suggests what unites the fauna like scarabs (moon beetles), baboon, ibis and field mouse is that they are all sacred to different gods and so their unsanctioned sacrifice is sacrilegious.[54] Pachrates' mixture, therefore, is likely not only determined by some criterion of disgust relative to the practitioner or audience (moreover, they would likely find many scents disgusting, so there must be some further criteria that determine this particular mixture). It seems rather that the scents serve as evidence of a sacrilegious offering, meant particularly to offend Selene, and that the proper selection of these ingredients is what distinguished Pachrates' skill. At least, so the story goes, the demonstration worked well enough to convince Emperor Hadrian when he encountered it.

Magical vs medical horror

In the previous sections, we have seen how certain ingredients and procedures were associated with emotions of horror through the medium of pernicious unseen forces. Such forces, however, were not universally accepted. Particularly for those who believed the cosmos to be inherently good, like Platonists and some other philosophical schools, the horror if any of such acts and materials resulted from moral and aesthetic disgust. An especially clear example of such an attitude comes from Galen of Pergamum.

In one of Galen's work on pharmacy, *Simple Drugs*, he describes his medical predecessors' encounters with magical ingredients, code names and filth pharmacy. He discusses in particular the work of two compilers of medical lore, Pamphilus and Xenocrates of Aphrodisias, who he claims included magical materials and incantations in their pharmacological writings. Galen says Pamphilus collected information from Hermes the Egyptian about 'incantations, transformations and sacred herbs of decans and demons',[55] while Xenocrates, 'a man who did not live that long ago, but in our grandparents' generation, wrote about eating people when Roman Imperial law had forbidden it', as well as about faeces, menstrual blood, semen and other typically magical bodily materials.[56] He criticizes both for their superstition; however, while he finds fault with Pamphilus for writing about such materials without testing them, he criticizes Xenocrates for testing such disgusting things.

Galen is working in a broadly Platonist tradition of thinking about magic, where incantations and magical recipes are considered, as Fritz Graf puts it, 'psychological poisons'.* Not only do they poison the minds of the victims with horror, but they also poison the minds of the practitioners by convincing them that they have control over the bodies of others and, even worse, over the gods.[57] Both victims and practitioners believe this, according to Plato, even though they have no evidence or understanding of how magic works and even though they know that engaging in such behaviours increases public distrust.[58] The problem, however, is pernicious, and Plato is resigned to the fact that people will believe in the power of demons; so rather than propose to educate it away, he thinks the state should implement laws to control the practice. Galen meanwhile is more determined to excise false beliefs, especially from medicine, which he normally does by presenting evidence that certain practices do not work. He does not think, however, that testing of the kind Hadrian engaged in is appropriate, at least for anyone who is not an emperor, since only an emperor in his view can justly condemn someone to die.[59]

Galen explicitly claims not to have encountered or tested filth pharmacy himself in a medical context. This is because such materials are illegal, especially the use of human body parts in medicine, as well as the fact that they elicit disgust. We can understand his reaction as a kind of abject horror in the sense proposed by Julia Kristeva: the horror of blood and other bodily fluids arises when these materials go beyond the body's boundary and leave their proper place.[60] Galen writes, 'there are many parts and fluids in the bodies of animals that other people have written about, but that I myself have never experienced; for some of them are indecent and disgusting, some are also forbidden by law'.[61] 'Other people' refers to Xenocrates, a writer from Galen's grandfather's generation who Galen says writes as if he had tested 'which illnesses are treated by eating human brain, flesh or liver, which by drinking bones of the head, shin, or fingers, burnt or unburnt, and which by blood itself'; or as if he had tested 'drinking sweat, urine and menstrual fluid'; or earwax (he says, 'I have never been sick to the point where I would dare to ingest this'[62]). Galen thinks all this material is 'indecent and disgusting' to varying degrees. He goes on to say, 'there is no one who would submit to an experience of these things while in their natural state, nor to what is more moderate than this (i.e. ingesting them) but still indecent, smearing some part of the body with faeces or human semen on account of some illness in it'.[63] The use of such materials occasions such feelings of abject horror and disgust in Galen that he thinks these materials should even be excluded from empirical study.

Therefore, Galen denies the forces that might lead to horrific dread of a Lovecraftian kind; nevertheless, he expresses abjection and moral disgust at the actions such beliefs lead to. The qualification of such acts as acts of 'horror', however, also depends for Galen on the social status of the one committing the act. He says that he came into possession of a book by Attalus III, the former king of Pergamum, who 'was extremely ambitious in acquiring experience of such things'.[64] Interestingly, Galen does not question the king's virtue, but claims if anyone else were to commit such acts, they would be horrific (*deinon,* δεινόν):

> Concerning what are called *philtra* (love procedures), *agogima* (attraction procedures), *oneiropompa* (dream-senders) and *misetra* (hate procedures) – for I am deliberately using their words – I would not have mentioned them in writing to begin with, even if I had a great deal of experience with them, just as I would not mention deadly drugs or the ones they call *pathopoia* (disease-makers). For what is attributed to them is ridiculous: binding opponents so that they are unable to speak in court or causing a pregnant woman to miscarry or never to conceive or whatever else. In the majority of cases, it is impossible to prove that these things exist, while for some, even if it were possible, surely, they are harmful to people's well-being, so that I wonder how in heaven's name anyone ever came to the decision to write these things down. For how could they hope that the very acts that bring infamy to the living once they have been disclosed would bring them fame after their death? If, therefore, they had, as kings, conducted experiments on people who had been sentenced to death, they did nothing horrific (*deinon*). But since they came to write about these things as ordinary people without claim to such an office at any point in their lives, then either they have not tested anything and are writing about things they are ignorant of, or, if they have tested them, then they are the most impious of all people.
>
> Τῶν δὲ καλουμένων φίλτρων, ἀγωγίμων, ὀνειροπομπῶν τε καὶ μισήτρων, αὐτοῖς γάρ τοῖς ἐκείνων ὀνόμασιν ἐξεπίτηδες χρῶμαι, τὴν ἀρχὴν ἂν, οὐδ᾽ εἰ πεῖραν ἱκανὴν εἶχον, ἐμνημόνευσα διά γραμμάτων, ὥσπερ οὐδὲ τῶν θανασίμων φαρμάκων ἢ τῶν ὡς αὐτοὶ

> καλοῦσιν παθοποιῶν. ἐκεῖνα μὲν γάρ αὐτῶν καὶ γελοῖα, καταδῆσαι τοὺς ἀντιδίκους, ὡς μηδὲν ἐπὶ τοῦ δικανικοῦ δυνηθῆναι φθέγξασθαι, ἢ ἐκτρῶσαι ποιῆσαι τὴν κύουσαν, ἢ μηδέποτε συλλαβεῖν, ὅσα τ' ἄλλα τοιαῦτα. Τά μέν γε πλεῖστα εἶναι τούτων ἐστὶ καὶ πρὸς τῆς πείρας ἀδύνατα ὑπάρχειν, ἔνια δὲ εἰ καὶ δυνατά, βλαβερά γοῦν γ' ἐστὶ τῷ βίῳ τῶν ἀνθρώπων, ὥστ' ἐγὼ νὴ τοὺς θεοὺς θαυμάζω κατά τίνα τὴν ἔννοιαν ἧκον ἐπὶ τὸ γράφειν αὐτά τινες. ἃ γὰρ καὶ τοῖς ζῶσιν ἀδοξίαν φέρει γνωσθέντα, πῶς ταῦτα μετὰ θάνατον εὐδοξίαν οἴσειν αὑτοῖς ἤλπισαν; εἰ μὲν οὖν βασιλεῖς ὄντες ἐν ἀνθρώποις ἐπὶ θανάτῳ κατακεκριμένοις ἐποιήσαντο τὴν τεῖραν αὐτῶν, οὐδὲν ἔπραξαν δεινόν. ἐπεὶ δ' ἰδιῶται τοιαύτης ἐξουσίας ἐν ὅλῳ τῷ βίῳ γεγονότες ἐπὶ τὸ γράφειν ἧκον αὐτὰ, δυοῖν θάτερον, ἢ μὴ πειραθέντες αὐτοὶ γράφουσιν ὑπὲρ ὧν οὐκ ἴσασιν, ἢ εἴπερ ἐπειράθησαν, ἀσεβέστατοι πάντων ἀνθρώπων εἰσὶν.
>
> *Gal.* SMT *10 proem, 12.251–253 K.*

Galen here categorizes the effects recipes for horror are designed produce and he distinguishes two situations in which they might be attempted. The effects are similar to those we have seen. They include things like binding spells and sending dreams and Galen says he is using the names popularly given to them. The two situations he distinguishes both involve using these practices on living people. The difference, however, lies in who is conducting the experiments: a king or an ordinary person. In the case of the king, Galen sees 'nothing horrific' (*ouden deinon,* οὐδὲν δεινόν) in the act, so long as it is conducted on prisoners already sentenced to death. In the case of ordinary people, who have no claim on the lives of anyone else, Galen thinks their acts are not only wrong but extremely impious.

Galen's claim that the king commits 'nothing horrific' (*ouden deinon,* οὐδὲν δεινόν) by testing procedures on prisoners sentenced to death gives some insight into what would make something a horror for Galen. It is not, as it is for Pachrates, powerful unseen forces that result in trembling and fear; rather what causes horror are the unknown intentions of ordinary people. Despite the fact that Galen, like Plato, is sceptical that magical practices can be rationally understood and that their unverifiability (or even unfalsifiability) discredits them as medical treatments, he nevertheless believes it is acceptable for those in absolute power to try to carry them out.[65] We can speculate, therefore, and wonder if Galen's judgement that a particular act is horrific and impious is determined by a fear of those who wish to cause harm through hidden means who are not socially sanctioned to do so, even if nothing demonic is actually involved. What determines an act as horrific or not, therefore, would be closely connected to Galen's ideas about legal and moral authority.

Encounter II: Replicating a blood and myrrh ink

The Recipe

> Take blood of a night owl and myrrh ink, mix the two together, and with a new reed draw the figure, as appended, on a clean piece of paper; and having stared simultaneously at a clean wall, glancing to the east, after fastening it to a pure linen

> cloth using thorns from a male date palm, veil the image completely. Having stepped back from it six cubits, after covering it, count to fifty-nine three times walking backwards, standing at the mark of the six cubits.
>
> Λαβὼν αἷμα νυκτιβαοῦτος καὶ ζμυρνομέλαν, ὁμοῦ τὰ δύο μίξας γράφε καινῷ καλάμῳ τὸ ζῴδιον, καθὼς περιέχι, εἰς πιττάκιον καθαρόν, καὶ ἅμ’ ἀτενίσας εἰς τοῖχον καθαρόν, εἰς ἀνατολὴν βλέπων, πήξας εἰς σουδάριον ὁλόλινον σκόλοψιν ἀρρενικοῦ φοίνικος συνκάλυπτε τὸ ζῴδιον καὶ ἀποστὰς ἀπ’ αὐτο̣ῦ̣ πήχεις ἕξ, συνκαλύψας μέτρησον πεντήκοντα ἐννέα ἐπὶ τρὶς ἀναποδίζων, στήκων ἐπὶ τὸ σημῖον τῶν ἓξ πηχῶν.
>
> GEMF *68* = PGM *XXXVI 264–74*

We turn now to a modern encounter of a recipe for horror: an *epideixis* of a replication of a blood ink recipe. Galen may have found the idea of testing such recipes horrific or disgusting, but, in fact, replicating them can help us address questions about the use of horrible ingredients like blood in magic procedures more generally. As with Pachrates' recipe in the previous section, my choice here is somewhat arbitrary. Both recipes are similar insofar as they use bodily fluids and myrrh; both also suggest abject and supernatural horror. This recipe, however, is chosen mostly for its simplicity.[66] It involves only two ingredients, blood and myrrh ink. Moreover, it does not explain what the blood in the ink is for, which allows us to explore what role an ingredient like blood might have.[67] Some scholars have recently suggested that blood may have been used to improve an ink's writing properties.[68] I believe however that the recipe includes blood to add to its horror; for, when we actually follow the recipe and compare the resulting blood ink to a myrrh ink without blood, we find that the blood does not improve the ink as a writing medium. It does, however, seem plausible that it would contribute a sense of horror to its production and use. Even if we take claims about its magical efficacy asserted by the recipe's authors with a grain of salt, there is nevertheless something unsettling even today about blood as a constituent of ink, especially if it has no evident practical purpose.

Recreating the recipe

Replicating a recipe requires that we model its ingredients and methods closely, but a precisely detailed recreation is not always possible or expedient.[69] We also cannot always replicate using only one identification of any ingredient, since there may be different plausible interpretations of what the ancient terms refer to. In such cases, we need to test a variety of interpretations in order to understand how different materials behave. What follows is a detailed explanation of the procedure involved in replicating this recipe for horror. These details are necessary for ensuring the reproducibility of the experimental conditions that were chosen and for understanding how those conditions address the question of the purpose of blood in this recipe.

First, instead of using blood of a night owl, we can use blood that is more easily available, such as a drop of human blood.[70] This is because the chemically relevant part of blood, its iron, does not differ much between human beings and other vertebrate animals.[71] Moreover, variation in the kinds of blood used is not without precedent. One myrrh ink uses baboon blood (*haima kunokephalou*, αἷμα κυνοκεφάλου), which the interpretations of *GEMF* 15 = *PGM* XII discussed previously record as a code name for lizard blood.[72] Another blood ink asks for blood of a human who died a violent death.[73] And in some cases, 'blood' is a code name for something other than blood, when it is used as a name for the red mineral *minium*, a common pigment for red inks.[74] Therefore, 'blood of a night owl' could already be the code name for some other animal's blood or for something the contains no blood at all. To simplify, we can blood that is easily available and set up a control that uses no blood at all.

Second, since the exact composition of the myrrh ink is unknown, it is necessary to determine a range of plausible mixtures to test. The myrrh in myrrh ink recipes can be myrrh that has been already burnt in a censer, or it can be unburnt.[75] If the myrrh in the ink is burnt myrrh, it would most likely be used to produce a carbon ink (discussed in what follows), but carbon inks require other ingredients to complete the ink, like binders and water. Likewise, if the myrrh is used raw or unburnt, again other ingredients would be needed to make a writable ink even if blood is added. Myrrh inks are common in magical Greek and Egyptian formulas and Christiansen and Blanco Cesteros assume that the myrrh in them is always burnt. Blanco Cesteros points to some additional passages in *GEMF* 57 = *PGM* IV where the ingredients of a magic ink, including myrrh, are first burnt as an offering.[76] I believe however we cannot rule out the possibility that the myrrh was supposed to be unburnt.[77] First, not all myrrh ink recipes claim to use burnt myrrh. Second, the scent of myrrh is important to its ritual use in other contexts, but the scent is removed if burnt. Third, there are myrrh ink recipes that have other sources of pigment, like iron-gall inks. So, to properly determine the role of blood in a myrrh ink, we need to use both myrrh ink from burnt and from unburnt myrrh.

As for other ingredients used in the myrrh ink, there are three possible mixtures corresponding to three kinds of ink that were in use at the time. First are carbon inks: early forms of black ink produced with water, pulverized carbonized organic matter, e.g. charcoal, such as from burnt myrrh, acting as a pigment, and something that binds the pigment to the writing surface, usually gum arabic, although blood has been reported to have been used for this purpose in other cultural contexts.[78] Most inks in fact that survive from antiquity are carbon inks. Second are iron-gall inks: produced from gallic and tannic acids, usually isolated from oak galls (Figure 12.1, left) by decoction, and iron salts, typically iron (ii) sulphate (Figure 12.1, right).[79] It is the presence of iron in these inks that connects them interestingly to the use of blood, which contains iron in relatively high amounts.[80] Third are mixed inks: carbon combined with iron-gall inks. The chemistry of iron-gall ink is important when thinking about whether myrrh is burnt or unburnt when it is used. If the ink includes burnt myrrh, then the myrrh ink the recipe refers to could either be a carbon ink or a carbon ink mixed with iron-gall. If the myrrh ink uses unburnt myrrh, however, then it would need to have contained some ingredient to make it legible, and iron-gall is a plausible candidate. The myrrh, then, would give the ink a distinct scent, rather than a dark pigment.

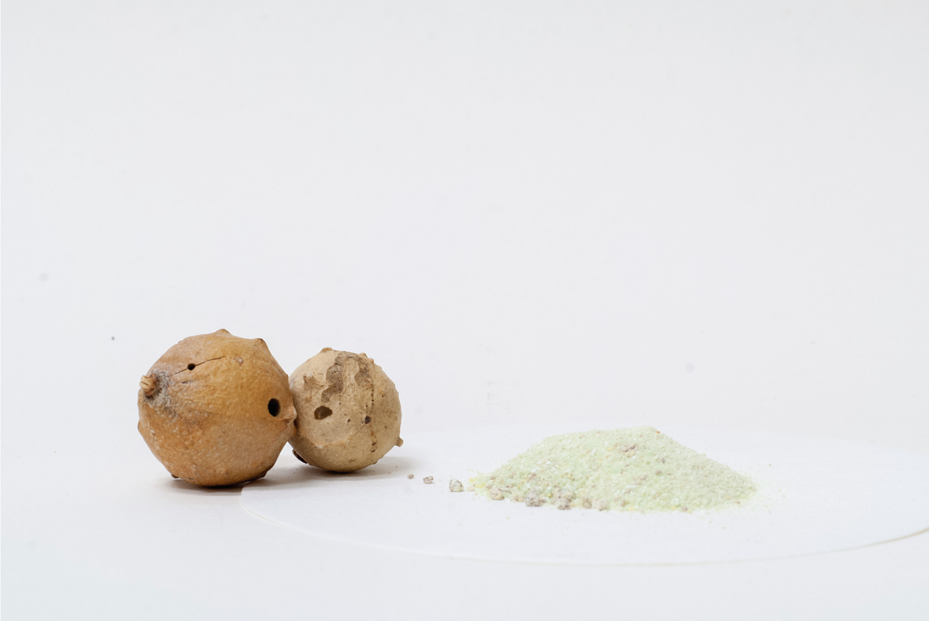

Figure 12.1 Constituents of iron-gall ink. Left: Oak galls from *Quercus infectoria* Oliv. 1801. Right: powdered iron (ii) sulphate or 'green vitriol'.

This makes for three kinds of myrrh ink (carbon ink with burnt myrrh, iron-gall ink with burnt myrrh, iron-gall ink with unburnt myrrh) that must be tested in comparison with their blood-containing counterparts. As a control, I also produced an iron-gall ink without myrrh and its blood-containing counterpart. There are, therefore, eight conditions to be tested:

1. CM: carbon ink (carbonized myrrh)
2. CM+B: carbon ink + blood (5:1)
3. G: iron-gall ink
4. G+CM: iron-gall ink + carbonized myrrh
5. G+UM: iron-gall ink + uncarbonized myrrh
6. G+B: iron-gall ink + blood
7. G+B+CM: iron-gall ink + blood + carbonized myrrh
8. G+B+UM: iron-gall ink + blood + uncarbonized myrrh

Materials and methods

Iron-gall blood ink test and preparation. Oak galls (from *Quercus infectoria* Oliv.) and iron (ii) sulphate were purchased in autumn 2021 from Kremer Pigmente in Germany.[81]

One oak gall (~5g) was pounded using a mortar into pieces 2–3 millimetres in diameter. 5 grams ground oak gall was placed in a flask with 50ml boiling water and agitated intermittently for 10 minutes. 10 grams of iron (ii) sulphate was ground to a fine powder in a mortar and then 5 grams was placed in a flask with 50 millilitres boiling water and stirred until dissolved. Both solutions were allowed to cool. Several millilitres of venous blood were obtained through finger pricks using a sterile needle which were collected in a sterile vial. Several drops of water were added to prevent coagulation. Iron (ii) sulphate and blood solutions were added dropwise (total 0.5ml) to the gallic acid solution. No agitation was used.

Carbon ink and raw myrrh. Suhul myrrh, a spontaneous exudate from *Commiphora myrrha* (Nees) Engl., provenance Somalia, was purchased from a German resin supplier spring 2022.[82] 10 grams were ground in a mortar to the consistency of wet sand, placed on aluminium foil, and suspended over a candle flame for one hour until a brittle, black, dry residue remained. 5 grams of the material was combined with 5 grams gum arabic and added to a mortar and ground to a fine powder. Water was added dropwise until a usable ink was produced. 5 grams of raw myrrh was added to another mortar with an equal amount of water and ground until a cream-coloured paste was produced.

Mixed blood inks. To produce the carbon and blood ink, 0.5 millilitres of blood was added to 2 millilitres of carbon ink. Iron-gall ink alone and iron-gall ink mixed with blood were each combined 1:1 with both carbonized and uncarbonized myrrh. Samples from each were dropped onto clean paper and then pulled along the surface using a clean dip pen and allowed to dry. Samples were photographed.

Results and discussion

An initial test was performed to determine whether human blood reacts with gallic acid to produce the dark-coloured pigment ferrous tannate (Figure 12.2, top). After several drops of iron (ii) sulphate solution were added to the gallic acid solution, there was an immediate reaction to a dark blue-black colour. When the same procedure was performed with several drops of blood, there was no reaction (Figure 12.2, centre). To make sure there was nothing wrong with the initial solution, several drops of iron (ii) sulphate were added to the blood and gallic acid mixture, which immediately produced a dark pigment (Figure 12.2, bottom).

The lack of any reaction when blood was added to the gallic solution suggests there was not enough available iron in the blood to produce an iron-gall ink. This is consistent with what one would expect based on vertebrate physiology. If there were free iron (ii) ions in the blood, it would be toxic to cells; for this reason, when iron is not bound to haemoglobin it is typically bound to other proteins like ferritin and stored in the liver.[83] There would not be freely available iron ions in the blood to produce the ink unless the iron-binding proteins themselves were denatured and destroyed.[84] Therefore it seems unlikely that blood was added to the myrrh ink in order to produce a darker pigment.[85]

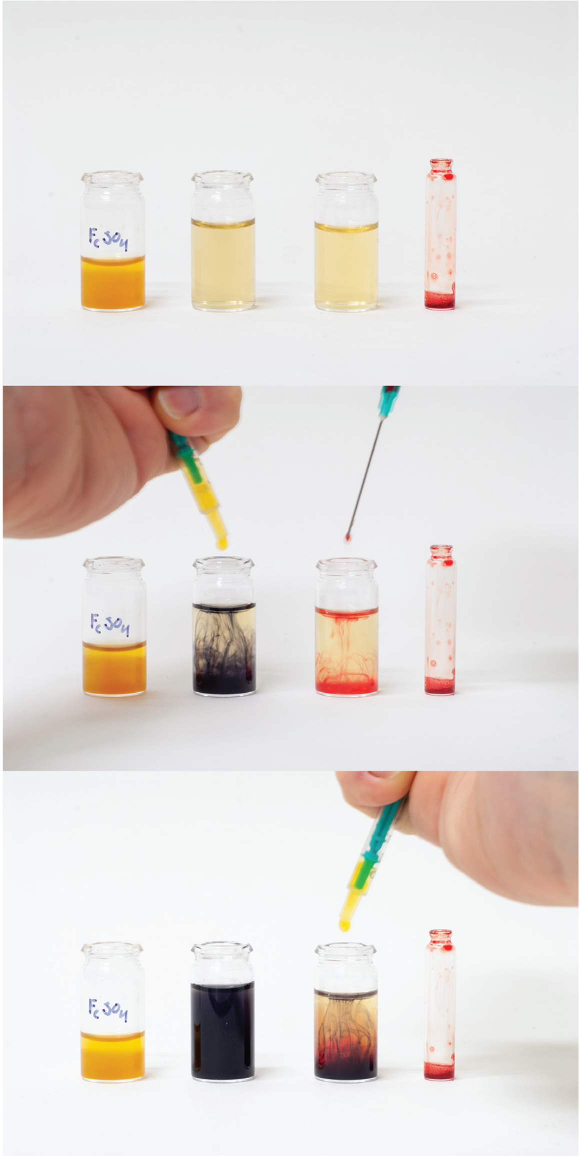

Figure 12.2 Experiment on the effects of blood and iron (ii) sulphate on a decoction of oak gall. Top photo shows (left to right) vial of iron (ii) sulphate solution (5g per 100ml), two vials oak gall decoction, and a small amount of the author's blood. Centre photo shows mixing of the reagents. On the left, iron (ii) sulphate reacts with gallic acids to form ferrous gallate, a blue-black pigment that reduces to insoluble ferric gallate in the presence of oxygen when dry. On the right, blood and the iron it contains does not react with the gallic acid to form any pigment. Bottom photo shows iron (ii) sulphate being added to the mixture of blood and oak gall decoction to show the solution could react. It seems unlikely blood was added to the mixture as a means of encouraging the formation of pigments.

The uncarbonized myrrh when ground with water produced a cream-coloured, slightly pink paste. It initially dissolved easily, but a fraction (likely water-insoluble resin) required a longer period of grinding to go into suspension (Figure 12.3, left). The scent of the myrrh was strong, with characteristic balsamic, mushroom, astringent, and sweet-resinous notes. Carbonized myrrh mixed with gum arabic and water produced a jet-black suspension within a few seconds of grinding in the mortar (Figure 12.3, right). Its scent was earthy, somewhat smoky.

When this carbon ink was added to the blood, there was a visually striking mix of red and black. They did not immediately combine and it took agitation to incorporate them. In terms of its appearance on paper, the carbon and carbon-blood inks were visually indistinguishable. Both produced a rich, deep black ink (Figure 12.4a–b). They were clearly different, however, from the iron-gall inks, which were light to dark blue, at least while still wet (Figure 12.4c–h). There were also no visible differences between iron-gall inks made with blood and those made without.[86] The most significant visual difference, in fact, was not between blood and non-blood inks, but between mixed inks made with carbonized myrrh and the inks made with raw myrrh. The latter were noticeably lighter

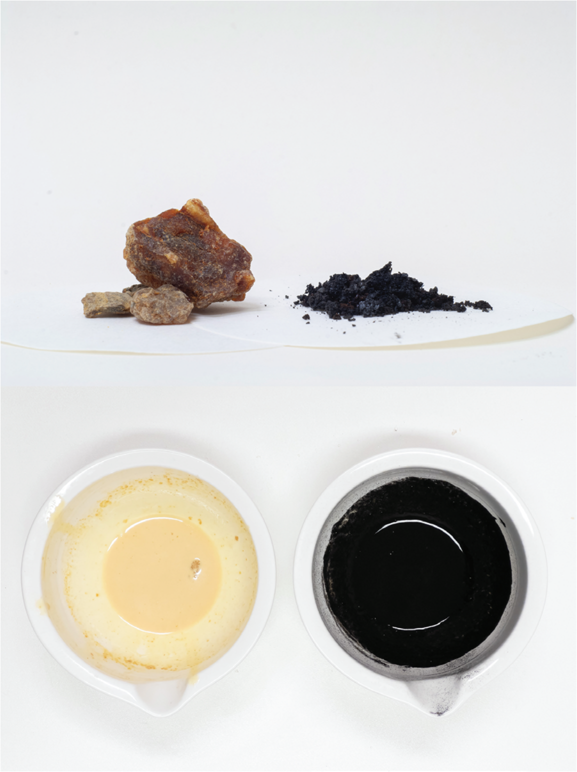

Figure 12.3 Constituents of myrrh inks. Raw gum-resin from *Commiphora myrrha* (Nees) Engl. (top left) is ground with a small amount of water (bottom left). Burnt residue of *C. myrrha* (top right) is ground with a small amount of water and gum arabic as a binder (bottom right).

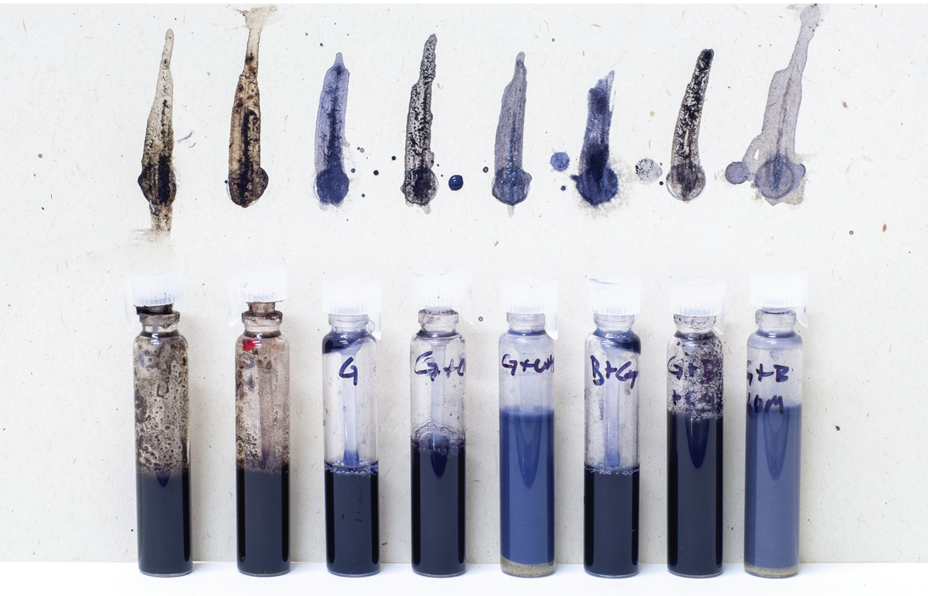

Figure 12.4 Myrrh and blood inks before agitation. From left to right: (a) burnt myrrh, gum arabic, water; (b) burnt myrrh, gum arabic, author's blood, water; (c) iron-gall ink; (d) iron-gall ink, burnt myrrh; (e) iron-gall ink, raw myrrh; (f) iron-gall ink, author's blood; (g) iron-gall ink, author's blood, burnt myrrh; (h) iron-gall ink, author's blood, raw myrrh.

in colour and strongly scented. In terms of ease of writing, none of the inks were well-made, nor did they write with any grace (due mostly likely to the skill of the experimenter). The scent of myrrh lingered on the paper in the case of inks produced with raw myrrh, while there was no noticeable difference in scent among the carbon, mixed or iron-gall ink without raw myrrh.[87]

Experimental conclusions

From these experiments, it seems unlikely that the blood is added to the ink because of its contribution to it as an ink. In the carbon ink, iron-gall ink, and mixed ink, blood did not alter their writability. In fact, the experiments have shown that animal blood, at least in the amounts added here, is unlikely to be a practical source of iron for producing iron-gall ink, nor does blood noticeably darken either carbon ink or iron-gall inks at the concentrations tested. The superfluousness of blood in an already constituted, useable ink, suggests it is added for a magical purpose whose testability lies outside the scope of these experiments.

Still, while its magical purpose cannot be tested, we can still consider the nature of the horror at play in this blood ink and in magical recipes more generally.[88] One way might be through Kristeva's notion of the abject: the disgust invoked by blood and other bodily fluids when encountered outside their proper place. Kristeva's analysis of horror as abject begins from Old Testament discussions of ritual pollution caused by blood.[89] It is the fact that blood is polluting that allows her to claim that it is abject and then seek common structures that account for it. She argues, in essence, that a primordial fear of the loss of bodily integrity manifests as revulsion and leads to blood being considered polluting. While similar sentiments of revulsion are found in Galen, they are not obviously paralleled in the Greek and Egyptian magical formularies, which do not explicitly link blood and pollution. This is not because concepts of pollution are not at play in magical contexts. We have seen pollution used in the context of Pachrates' burnt offering, where it was connected to appropriate and inappropriate offerings to Selene. Purity conventions in ancient Egypt have what Joachim Quack calls more generally a 'delimiting function',* determining where and when things, including bodily fluids, are allowed to be.[90] The myrrh ink recipe, however, does not make it clear where its authors or practitioners consider those boundaries to be; it may be that they extend beyond the boundaries of the victim's body. As Christiansen has noted, ingredients like blood are frequently used at this time and place: they could be a common product resulting from slaughter of sacred animals for the practice of offering animal mummies, a practice that took place on an industrial scale in Late Period Egypt.[91] He also notes that blood is used in Egyptian medicine, which corresponds, as we have seen, with its use by Galen's medical contemporaries such as Xenocrates of Aphrodisias, who felt no horror using blood, semen, menstrual blood, or earwax in their treatments.

Another way we might understand the horror of blood in this recipe is through its sensorial aspect. When it was collected and before being incorporated into the ink, the blood was shiny, slimy and slippery, a deep red colour, smelling of metal. It did not incorporate easily into the ink, manifesting as a red frothy trace on the liquid's surface (cf. Figure 12.4b). Its shining colour and thickness, especially when used in large quantities, is unsettling in a way that is difficult to express. The experience is similar to the effect of sensorial horror in contemporary film, where close-ups of blood and emphasis on its tactile qualities can be used to elicit revulsion, disgust and titillation.[92] However, there is little textual evidence in the Greek and Egyptian magical formularies for sensorial horror of blood. Blood itself is often mentioned, but almost always as an ingredient without comment, no more unsettling than any other. This may be because, as Blanco Cesteros has suggested, blood is often a code name for other, less horrifying, materials.[93] Yet, at the same time, code names referring to blood might also suggest that the sensorial (or even abject) sense of horror elicited by blood are precisely what led to it being used as a code name in the first place: to keep the uninitiated away from performing the recipes due to the horrific nature of the ingredients.

One final way of understanding the horror of the blood ink is supernatural. This is the kind of horror that seems most absent from the performative context of a scientific experiment as presented in this chapter. Blood used and described as an experimental condition is no more or less demonic than any other material. The use of blood for ritual purposes, however, is a cause and source of horror, in a Lovecraftian sense, in the magical recipe for a myrrh blood ink; and the same holds for other recipes involving distorted and dismembered bodies. Their parts are required by the supernatural entities that the practitioners are trying to manipulate and control, while their victims are simply instruments used to fulfil those aims. The absence of supernatural horror in a replication, however, is not only a difference between a modern experience of these recipes and an ancient one. For Galen, too, the items of the *Dreckapotheke* were objects of abject horror without any hint that he considered they might be able to suspend the fixed laws of nature.

Conclusion: Encountering recipes for horror

This chapter began with several tensions: between supernatural and bodily horror and between textual transmission and cultural continuity. As we have seen, among Greek and Egyptian magical sources, what Lovecraft called 'the dread of outer, unknown forces' is often localized and centred in the bodies of its victims. This is evident both from descriptions of the kinds of fear that demonic magic is meant to produce and in the bodily distortions and mutilations their procedures describe. The targets of the procedures, the *Dreckapotheke* and other disgusting ingredients they use from animal and human bodies, and occasionally even the practitioners themselves, become designated places where such forces are manifested.

The body in fact is a critical site where our sources suggest unseen forces are experienced and evaluated – either as reliable and governable, as seen with Pachrates and Hadrian, or as existing things in the world, as seen with Galen. Moreover, the focus on display or *epideixis* involving the body and its manipulation suggests that the fear of these forces goes beyond a fear of spiritual or unseen actors outside of our control. The world of fixed laws and the world of demons is perhaps not as distant as Lovecraft suggests. The existence of magical formulae and a common set of magical materials implies that these procedures were taken to be reliable in much the same way as procedures that make use of everyday forces of nature. This holds even though their reliability was imperfect and even though writers like Plato or Galen doubted the possibility of manipulating the unseen world. In either case, violence was inflicted on victims in the service of confirming or disconfirming such claims.

Even in the sterilized context of a laboratory replication, where replicability is of central importance, there is a dread – albeit muted – upon discovering that blood may have served no practical purpose as a material in itself but was instead used to call on malign forces. Blood may be abject, evoking disgust through a recognition of our own bodily distortion. However, in this context, it also brings an expectation of something fearful through its presence. The expectation seems not to be due to any innate sense of what blood is but rather to the continuation of an ancient tradition of mediating desire through bodily violence. Thus, the horror found in these ancient recipes is not just about uncontrollable agents but also about the tangible, violent experiences the recipes evoke and the deep cultural roots they dimly trace.

Notes

1. This chapter was written as part of the grant project GM21-30494M 'Alchemies of Scent' supported by the Czech Science Foundation and coordinated by the Institute of Philosophy of the Czech Academy of Sciences in Prague. Thanks to participants of the conference, 'Medical Knowledge and its "Sitz im Leben": Body and Horror in Antiquity', for helpful discussion, especially Nick Lowe and Glenn Most; special thanks to Dana Zentgraf for acquiring materials for a practical demonstration of the ink on this occasion. I am grateful to Victor Golubev and Laura Prieto for help with the experiments, and to Miriam Blanco Cesteros, Thomas Christiansen, George Kazantzidis, Diana Míčková and Maddalena Rumor for comments on various drafts. I am especially grateful to Ronja Hildebrandt and Chiara Thumiger for discussion and extensive comments on the final draft. Errors are my own.
2. Arist. *De an.* 1.5, 411a8. He attributes it to Thales, but at Arist. *Gen. an.* 3.11, 762a21, he agrees at least in spirit when he says, 'in a way all things are full of soul'. I do not mean to suggest ancient Graeco-Roman thinkers denied there was regularity in the cosmos (this is a fact to be explained, not something that can reasonably be doubted); rather, my point is that they did not use the idea of fixed laws to explain it. This strategy of explanation does not appear in Europe until the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. On this see Menn 2000: 139–43. For Lovecraft on classical sources, see Moreland 2018. Throughout this chapter, I follow the abbreviations of the Oxford Classical Dictionary, fourth edition.
3. This serves as my working definition of supernatural horror. It is however only one way of thinking about horror. I discuss Kristeva's characterization of horror as 'abject' below. As Thomas Christiansen points out to me, while horror involves disgust, it also involves fascination and attraction, of which the recipes in this chapter (and the chapter and volume itself) are examples. I can only touch on these themes here.
4. As Miriam Blanco Cesteros suggests to me, some lines of transmission likely begin from Hellenistic Greek and especially post-Augustan Latin descriptions of witches, e.g. Hor. *Ep.* 5 and Apul. *Met.* 3.17. These lines are explored in Ager 2022.
5. Many of these texts are included in a new collection, the *Greek and Egyptian Magical Formularies* (*GEMF*), edited by Christopher Faraone and Sofía Torallas Tovar (Faraone and Torallas Tovar 2022, hereafter FTT). I have used these editions when published (only one volume so far of several proposed). For the rest, I have made use of the collection of *Greek Magical Papyri* (*Papyri Graecae Magicae* or *PGM*), edited and translated into German under Karl Preisendanz' editorship in the mid-twentieth century (Preisendanz 1928, 1931) and translated into English by numerous scholars under Hans Dieter Betz's editorship at the University of Chicago a few generations later (Betz 1986). The magical papyri are often written in multiple languages, including Greek, Egyptian (in hieratic, Demotic and Coptic scripts) and cipher. The *GEMF* volumes edit all languages, while the *PGM* printed only the Greek language portions. This was partly corrected by Betz' inclusion of translations of the *Magical Demotic Papyri* (*PDM*). Recipes will be cited by *GEMF* or *PGM*/*PDM* number and line number, followed by page and line number of the edition. The reader should keep in mind that despite being included in collections, the nature of the texts themselves and their relation to one another is still unclear and a matter of ongoing scholarly investigation. Other texts, mostly from medical authors, will be introduced along the way using standard conventions.
6. I am using the term 'recipe' to describe any set of instructions for combining ingredients as part of magical or ritualistic procedures, including rites, rituals, incantations and prayers. These are essentially texts that guide someone in performing a specific action, falling into the category of what might be termed *Gebrauchstexte* (utilitarian texts). Despite occasionally

featuring unusual or highly technical language, these recipes (or procedures, as I will use interchangeably) offer a pragmatic window into the practices they describe. On recipes in general, see Lehmhaus and Martelli 2017. On recipes as fluid texts, see Raggetti 2018.

7. There are obviously many literary sources that depict encounters with magic, even magic recipes, but I limit my focus to pragmatic texts themselves (although the boundary can at times be fuzzy). It seems to me that magical recipes and medical texts occupy a distinctive place in the corpus of ancient texts, since they record the practical aspect of how people in the ancient Mediterranean world sought to understand, harness and protect themselves from unseen forces.
8. For recent examples, see Raggetti 2021; Marchini et al. 2022.
9. Tullett 2023: 31–5.
10. The papyrus been extensively studied by experts of ancient magic, most recently by Dieleman and Sarischouli. Agathokles' dream-sender is one of twenty-nine recipes written on the back (*verso*) of a scroll whose front (*recto*) preserves an ancient Egyptian novel called *The Myth of the Sun's Eye*. On palaeographical grounds, Dieleman and Sarischouli, who published an edition with others as *Greek and Egyptian Magical Formulary* 15 (*GEMF* 15, see Dieleman, Sarischouli et al. 2022), suggest it dates from the second century CE, while earlier scholars had dated it to the fourth century (Dieleman and Sarischouli 2022: 67). They also think that the collection is the work of several scribes, who wrote a corpus using a mixture of languages and scripts, primarily Demotic and Greek, but also hieratic and cipher (Dieleman and Sarischouli 2022: 64). The papyrus came to the attention of European collectors when, in 1828, it was purchased on behalf of the Dutch government as part of a set of Egyptian relics. It was catalogued as Leiden papyrus I 384, and later edited and published (the Greek text anyway) as part of Preisendanz' *Papyri Graecae Magicae* XII.
11. 'NN' is used in translation of Graeco-Egyptian magic as a generic proper-name placeholder for a spell's target. It may derive from the Latin phrase *nomen nescio* ('I do not know the name'), *nomen nominandum* ('name to be named'), or even *nomen notetur* ('name to be noted'). It is a modern convention, translating the ancient Greek word 'δεῖνα', which just means 'so-and-so'. For the history of the convention, see Dosoo and Preininger 2023: 33.
12. Ciraolo 2001: 279.
13. These terms were explored by Lowe 2021.
14. On *phrikē* (φρίκη), see Cairnes 2015.
15. Iunx (ἴυγξ) referred first to the wryneck, a kind of bird that as part of a magical procedure was tied to a revolving wheel which somehow attracted the victim; later it came to refer to the wheel itself spun with a string but without the bird, and finally to any attracting charm or spell (Faraone 1999: 25). It features prominently in Theocritus' *Idyll* 2 called the Φαρμακεύτριαι or 'The Sorceresses'. While it does not appear in *GEMF* or *PGM* collections, *iugges* are associated with Cleopatra VII, queen of Egypt, who ruled 51–30 BCE (e.g. Suda ι 761 and see Faraone 1999: 121).
16. The text of the procedure is found in the Paris Magical Codex, Bibliothèque nationale de France papyrus Supplément grec 574, which Preisendanz included in his collection as *PGM* IV and is numbered as *GEMF* 57 by Faraone and Torallas Tovar. Scholars of magical texts suggest it is a fourth-century CE codex, and note that it is one of the longest ancient Graeco-Egyptian magical texts found, at 72 pages in length (Love 2016: 4, LiDonnici 2022: 170). Although there is some debate, Korshi Dosoo and Edward Love have argued it is part of the Theban Magical Library, a collection of magical texts in Greek and Demotic found in the nineteenth century and part of the set of Egyptian relics acquired by European collectors starting in 1828 and 1857 that I mentioned earlier (Love 2016: 8, Dosoo 2016: 259). The

codex itself has been described as a 'library' by Lynn LiDonnici in her study of its structure, because the compiler seems to have collected and categorized texts according to internal similarities, such as the divinity named in the procedure, etc. (LiDonnici 2022: 169).

17. The deity is called Aktiōphis (Ἀκτιῶφις, *GEMF* 57 = PGM IV 2473), an epithet of Selene (*GEMF* 57 = *PGM* IV 2525, 2558, 2569), but she is addressed by other names as well, like Artemis (*GEMF* 57 = *PGM* IV 2523), Persephone (*GEMF* 57 = *PGM* IV 2524), Aphrodite (*GEMF* 57 = *PGM* IV 2557) and the Mesopotamian goddess Ereškigal (Ερεσχιγαλ, *GEMF* 57 = *PGM* IV 2484; see Schwemer 2018: 66). LiDonnici argues (convincingly I think) that the spells (*logoi*) or hymns likely predate the procedures and show a syncretism of female, lunar deities including Selene, Artemis, Hecate and Persephone along with Aphrodite (LiDonnici 2022: 188–90). As Chiara Thumiger points out to me, Selene and Hecate also figure prominently in Theocritus' *Idyll* 2 and the rites there likewise involve burnt offerings (although with different ingredients). On this, see Faraone 1999: 50.
18. *hē deina*, ἡ δεῖνα, e.g. at *GEMF* 57 = *PGM* IV 2476, 2478, 2484.
19. Escolano-Poveda 2020: 132.
20. See Erman 1890: 10–11. The text has been recently translated by Diana Míčková and Dorotea Wollnerová (2019a: 77–111), with interlineal glosses available at Míčková and Wollnerová 2019b. Similar examples are found in the Demotic story of Setne II (Lichtheim 1980: 142–4) and in *Exodus*' story of Aaron and pharaoh's magicians turning sticks into snakes at *Exod.* 7:8–13. Thanks to Diana Míčková for discussion on these points.
21. On the term, see Escolano-Poveda 2020: 90.
22. The parallel attraction procedure and incense offering in the next entry at *GEMF* 57 = *PGM* IV 2674–94 contains some but not all the same ingredients. This suggests to me that the selection of materials is a matter of expertise.
23. Edmonds 2020: 35.
24. Totelin 2004, Mayor 2010.
25. See Bubb 2022: 58–76, Salas 2021: 29–30, von Staden 1997: 37–9.
26. von Staden 1997: 39.
27. Gal. *Lib. Prop*. 3.15-18, 19.22 K. = 144,19–145,15 Boudon-Millot.
28. Salas 2021: 37–40, Bubb 2022: 70. Some of these have now been re-enacted by the Atlomy Project, funded by the European Research Council and headed by Orly Lewis at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. See Pelavski et al. 2024.
29. For detailed discussion, see Escolano-Poveda 2020: 181–4.
30. Lucian, *Philops*. 34.
31. Ogden 2004: 101–10.
32. Lucian *Philops*. 34–6.
33. *GEMF* 16.675–82 = *PDM* XIV 675–94 [*PGM* XIVc 16–27] = FTT 222,1–8.
34. Pachoumi 2017: 134.
35. Faraone 1999; see also Edmonds 2019.
36. Faraone 1999: 50.
37. Faraone 1999: 60.
38. Faraone 1999: 59.
39. Pachoumi 2017: 7, Quack 2018, Nagel 2018.
40. Nagel 2018: 144, Quack 2018: 204.

41. Here, most likely the goddess rather than the victim, since the spell (quoted previously) begins by asking Aktiōphis/Selene to appear.
42. One ingredient, Italian cyperus (*cyperus Italikos*, κύπερος Ἰταλικός), is otherwise unattested; no other form of cyperus appears in the magical papyri. For ointments in statuary, see Wilde et al. 2025.
43. Rumor 2015; 2020.
44. *GEMF* 16 = *PDM* XIV 428–35 = 192,5–8 FTT
45. For flacons, see *GEMF* 31 = *PGM* I 1–5; for crocodile eggs, *GEMF* 16 77–8.
46. See e.g. Bortolani 2016: 304, Rumor 2020, Blanco Cesteros 2020.
47. See, however, Blanco Cesteros 2020, who argues that the names are not coded in order to hide them, but technical Greek jargon of which there are traces in Dioscorides.
48. *GEMF* 15 462, 472.
49. *GEMF* 15 463
50. *GEMF* 57 = *PGM* IV 2670–90. See Ager 2022: 82–3.
51. On these scents and how they were received, see Ager 2022: 79-85.
52. Ager 2022: 82–3.
53. Jørgensen 2015: 149.
54. Bortolani 2016: 304–5.
55. Gal. *SMT* 6 pr., 11.797–8 K.: *epoōidas kai metamorphōseis kai dekanōn kai daimonōn hieras botanas,* ἐπῳδὰς καὶ μεταμορφώσεις καὶ δεκανῶν καὶ δαιμόνων ἱερὰς βοτάνας.
56. Gal. *SMT* 10 pr., 12.284 K.: *ho Xenokratēs, anthrōpos ou palai gegonōs, alla kata tous pappous hēmōn, tēs Rōmaïkēs basileias apēgoreukuias anthrōpous esthiein,* ὁ Ξενοκράτης, ἄνθρωπος οὐ πάλαι γεγονὼς, ἀλλὰ κατὰ τοὺς πάππους ἡμῶν, τῆς Ῥωμαϊκῆς βασιλείας ἀπηγορευκυίας ἀνθρώπους ἐσθίειν. On Galen's relation to Pamphilus and Xenocrates, see Petit 2017. On the context of Xenocrates' disgusting materials, see Petit 2020.
57. Graf 2002: 97–9.
58. Pl. *Leg.* 11, 932E–933B.
59. Gal. *SMT* 10 pr., 12.252 K.
60. Kristeva [1982] 2024.
61. Gal. *SMT* 10 pr., 12.248 K.
62. Gal. *SMT* 10 pr., 12.248–9 K.
63. Gal. *SMT* 10 pr., 12.249 K.
64. Gal. *SMT* 10 pr., 12.251–2 K.
65. It should be noted, as Caroline Petit has shown, that Galen sometimes does admit the effectiveness of cures like amulets in *SMT*. See Petit 2017: 63–6.
66. Thanks to Thomas Christiansen for pressing me to clarify the choice of this recipe.
67. On blood in ancient magic, see Watson 2019: 138.
68. Miriam Blanco Cesteros 2021: 39 points out that the use of blood is not restricted to ritual or magical contexts and that it can be a source of red pigment (cf. Scott et al. 1996, Yu 2020). Research by Bicchieri and Pinzari 2016 has found traces of erythrocytes (red blood cells) on the surface of a tenth-century non-magical manuscript from Yemen that was written using iron-gall inks and hypothesize that the blood acted as an unusual source of iron for making the ink. To test their hypothesis, they produced iron-gall inks using Aleppo oak galls mixed

with either iron (ii) sulphate or a combination of iron (ii) sulphate and human blood and found all three produced an ink, with the blood inks resulting in darker blacks.

69. Fors et al. 2016.
70. Many myrrh and blood inks source their blood from birds, e.g. white dove (*peristeras leukēs haima*, περιστερᾶς λευκῆς αἷμα, *GEMF* 57 = *PGM* IV 2888; *GEMF* 72 = *PGM* VIII 69), crow (*haima korōnēs*, αἷμα κορώνης, *GEMF* 72 = *PGM* VIII 69), quail (*haima ortugiou*, αἷμα ὀρτυγίου, *GEMF* 15 = *PGM* XII 145).
71. Doty and Lednev 2018.
72. For baboon blood recipe, see *GEMF* 60 = *PGM* XIII 316.
73. *GEMF* 57 = *PGM* IV 2201.
74. Blanco Cesteros 2021: 50–5. Many thanks to Thomas Christiansen for bringing this possibility to my attention. In the replication that follows, I do not test red mineral pigments, but it is nevertheless a possible interpretation worth an experiment.
75. Myrrh is a common writing medium in the Greek and Egyptian magical formularies, probably because of its magical and ritualistic symbolism. Myrrh is associated, for example, with Selene at *GEMF* 60 = *PGM* XIII 20.
76. Blanco Cesteros 2021: 37–8.
77. Blanco Cesteros (forthcoming) has independently carried out similar experiments with raw myrrh as part of her project, *INKQuiry*, focusing especially on the taste of the ink, which is excessively bitter.
78. Scott et al. 1996. Blanco Cesteros 2021: 38 suggests a binder may have been intentionally lacking in many magical inks; she points out this may be because they were meant to be temporary.
79. Iron (ii) sulphate is also called 'green vitriol'. The word in ancient Greek is '*chalchanthos*' (χάλκανθος). A myrrh ink recipe is preserved in the *Greek and Egyptian Magical Formularies* and is useful for reconstructing the procedure. The ink is used in a charisma procedure. It contains 1 part myrrh, 4 parts misy (mistranslated as 'truffle' in Betz, perhaps iron sulphide, see Christiansen 2017: 184), 2 parts *chalchanthos*, an impure source of iron (ii) sulphate, 2 parts oak gall, and 3 parts gum arabic (*GEMF* 15 448 = *PGM* XII 400 = 118,1 FTT).
80. The inks are produced when iron ions bind to the organic gallic and tannic acids to form complexes of ferrous gallate or tannate, which, while drying, react with atmospheric oxygen to produce ferric gallate and tannate, which are dark in colour and insoluble in water; see Díaz Hidalgo et al. 2018.
81. Kremer Pigmente GmbH & Co. KG (Hauptstr. 41–7, 88317 Aichstetten DE, www.kremer-pigmente.com).
82. Georg Huber of Mothers Goods (Kalterer Str. 29, 64646 Heppenheim DE, mothersgoods.com).
83. Muñoz et al. 2011.
84. One could do this with heat, but heat it is not indicated in the recipe.
85. No spectroscopic analysis on the inks was performed and thus results from the two experiments are not directly comparable. However, the comparison of one drop iron (ii) sulphate to one drop blood suggests that blood is not a suitable source of iron for producing the inks. In their procedure, Bicchieri and Pinzari 2016: 572 combined a standard iron-gall ink with blood in a 2:1 ratio. But in this case, even if there were free iron in the blood, it is unclear how much unreacted gallic or tannic acids would have been present when the blood

was added, but we would assume there would need to be unreacted gallic or tannic acids to make the ink darker.

86. This may be due to the use of lower concentrations of blood than in the experiments by Bicchieri and Pinzari.
87. No spectroscopic measurements were made of the inks in liquid form or dry on the paper. While I think the value of such measurements for assessing visual variations is dubious, I admit that, if some variation is shown, the process may be replicable and made more efficient.
88. Kieschnick 2000 explores a similar question, although not focuesd on horror, but the ascetic aspects of blood writing found among Chinese Buddhist scribes. There, according to Kieschick, and similar to what we see in *GEMF*, blood is a flexible material: a source of uneasiness, fear, morbid fascination as well as ritually and spiritually useful (Kieschnick 2000: 190). Thanks to Thomas Christiansen for pointing this out to me.
89. Kristeva [1982] 2024: 97–100.
90. Quack 2013: 152.
91. Christiansen 2017: 180–1.
92. Powell 2012: 172–3.
93. Blanco Cesteros 2021: 51–3.

CHAPTER 13

DISSECTING THE GOTHIC: HORROR AND THE ROMANTIC BODY IN SHERIDAN LE FANU'S *IN A GLASS DARKLY*

Arden Hegele

This chapter excavates the history of medicine that undergirds one of the nineteenth century's most beloved and influential volumes of supernatural tales: Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's *In a Glass Darkly* (1872). Published one year before the death of the writer, the book is a collection of five ghost stories that radically juxtaposes the supernatural events related by the characters with a distinctly materialist overarching frame. While *In a Glass Darkly* is perhaps best known for its final tale of horror – 'Carmilla', Le Fanu's foundational tale of female vampirism – the first story in the collection, 'Green Tea', is in itself a case study of the literary mediation of a metaphysical event through the interposition of medicalization.

'Green Tea' is the case history of the Reverend Mr Jennings, a clergyman who is haunted and eventually driven to suicide by a spectral monkey with red eyes. Henry James called the story 'the ideal reading in a country house for the hours after midnight'.[1] More recently, Jack Sullivan has named 'Green Tea' 'the archetypal ghost story' because of its 'uncompromising' form; the text embodies 'supernatural horror in its purest and most revolutionary manifestation'.[2] Despite the supernatural events at the heart of the story, however, Le Fanu is careful to frame the narrative through literary devices rooted in the field of nineteenth-century medicine. Strikingly, he chooses not to include the medicine of the mid-Victorian period when the story was written, but features instead the Romantic medicine that was contemporaneous with the fictional setting of 'Green Tea'. In what follows, I will discuss how the elaborate frame narration of 'Green Tea' actively recruits Romantic-era historical advances in anatomy as it makes the claim to pathological objectivity that is essential to the collection's chilling effect on the reader.

First published in 1869 as a standalone ghost story, and then reprinted as the first tale of Le Fanu's 1872 volume, 'Green Tea' establishes the framing structure of *In a Glass Darkly*. The subtitle of the story, 'A Case Reported by Martin Hesselius, the German Physician', establishes a claim to empirical authenticity that Le Fanu would artfully extend over the narratives that follow (irrespective of when the individual tales of horror were written; the second and third stories, 'The Familiar' and 'Mr. Justice Harbottle', are reworkings of Le Fanu's previously published materials, which did not use this device of frame narration).

In a Glass Darkly purports to be an archival collection of case histories written before 1819 by Dr Martin Hesselius, a 'medical philosopher' whose occult findings seem always to have a biological explanation.[3] A prefiguration of Bram Stoker's Van Helsing and Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes, the fictional Hesselius is a gifted diagnostician who can read at a glance the biological truths underpinning the most curious of nervous distortions: 'His knowledge was immense, his grasp of a case was an intuition'.*[4] A shadowy figure who recurs throughout the collection to remind the reader that each of these tales of horror is supposed to be explainable with biological empiricism, Hesselius is long-winded and boastful: 'Fifty-seven such cases have I encountered, neither more nor less. And in how many of these have I failed? In no one single instance.'*[5] When he meets with failure, he is self-defensive: 'I had not even commenced to treat Mr Jennings's case [the central story of 'Green Tea']. I have not any doubt that I should have cured him perfectly in eighteen months.'*[6] Despite his asseverations of expertise, Hesselius' failures are integral to the cases that exceed his understanding – all of which happen to be the cases that make up the volume.

The frame narrator of 'Green Tea', and thus the collection as a whole, is not Hesselius, however, but his anonymous editor and literary executor, who begins the Prologue with a brief account of his own curious biography. 'Though carefully educated in medicine and surgery, I have never practised either', the editor says in the first sentences of the volume. The reason he had never practised, he explains, was 'a very trifling scratch inflicted by a dissecting knife. This trifle cost me the loss of two fingers, amputated promptly.'*[7] Following this extraordinary and mysterious injury, the young man loses his sense of purpose and wanders the world. Eventually, he encounters Dr Hesselius, who becomes his 'master'. He serves Hesselius faithfully for nearly twenty years as a medical amanuensis (notwithstanding the injury to his hand). When Hesselius dies, the narrator is left 'an immense collection of papers . . . to be arranged, indexed, and bound'.*[8] As Hesselius' literary executor, the narrator must decide whether to pursue publication in a medical journal, or, as he has preferred to do here, to publish select cases to 'amuse or horrify a lay reader'.*[9] In this briefest of character sketches, we can detect in the anonymous narrator of 'Green Tea' a foreshadowing of Dr John Watson – a medical doctor whose on-the-job injury has driven him to turn to a career as a reporter of curious cases that exceed the usual bounds of medicine and science. Also like Watson, the narrator of 'Green Tea' is drawn into the thrall of a stronger personality who personifies both masculinity and scientific genius.

This brief but suggestive frame opening to 'Green Tea' sets the scene for the work's thematic engagement with the domain of medicine, whose influence on this text has been tentatively but not entirely recognized. Writing for the *British Medical Journal*, Theodore Dalrymple (a pseudonym for Anthony Malcolm Daniels, a prison psychiatrist and conservative cultural critic) makes humorous work of Hesselius' confused diagnostic account of the 'multifactorial' causes of the Reverend Jennings's simian hallucination. Dalrymple notes that Hesselius variously attributes Jennings' psychopathology to an overdose of green tea, a paranoid personality, morbid interests in the supernatural, and hereditary suicidal impulses.[10] The literary scholar Simon Cooke, in turn, refers to a possible intertext from the register of Victorian psychiatry – specifically, Alexandre Brière de Boismont's *On Hallucinations*, which was translated into English in 1859. For

Cooke, *In a Glass Darkly* is informed by de Boismont's case studies in the central hallucination of 'Green Tea', as well as in the framing narrative device of *On Hallucinations*, which is noticeably 'reproduced in Le Fanu's arrangement of the "Prologue" . . . the case study . . . and the "Conclusion" in "Green Tea"'.[11] By drawing attention to Le Fanu's medicalized register, these scholars offer a counter-narrative to more classical readings of 'Green Tea', which have tended to focus on the supernatural register by interpreting the symbolic significance of the spectral monkey – which has been read, variously, as a representation of Anglo-Irish otherness, as an allegory of empire, or as a manifestation of Jennings' (and possibly Le Fanu's) repressed homosexual desires.[12]

Yet 'Green Tea' comes to read very differently when the story is interpreted as evocative of the medicine of the early nineteenth century – that is, the time when the narrative of the case is likely set. Even the setting of the case is a fuzzy problem for interpretation: while certain details of the frame narrative seem to point towards a precise dating, details within the story of 'Green Tea' suggest a time distortion. The anonymous frame narrator refers to the 1819 death of Hesselius's correspondent, making clear that the case history was written before that time; he also states that this case occurred fifty-four years in the past (that is, from the 1869 date of the first publication, 1815 at the earliest). And yet, the Reverend Jennings rides an omnibus, a vehicle not introduced to London until 1831.[13] While the collection pretends to historical exactness, its confused temporality calls into question the earnest claims to empiricism that are made by its medical narrators. Yet in spite of this vagueness about dating, other details of 'Green Tea' situate the story firmly in the epistemological moment of Romantic-era medicine (*c.* 1789–1824).

What follows will argue that the influence of Romantic medicine proves to be formal as well as thematic. As an account of a curious case, 'Green Tea' intertwines the narrative devices of the ghost story with the generic conventions of the early nineteenth-century medical case history. The result is an unstable text that is governed by contrasting layers of narration, which – although they make a claim to objectivity – have the practical effect of troubling medical authority by casting doubt on the physician's voice. By tracing how Le Fanu integrates the generic norms of early nineteenth-century medical reporting into his supernatural tales, we can discover how the Romantic case history affords unexpected scaffolding for the gothic ironizing of a medical authority that was historically codified in this period.

* * *

Beginning with the loaded symbolism of the dissection that led to the frame narrator's amputated fingers, Le Fanu's case history betrays the influence of the medical field that was undergoing the most rapid development at the turn of the nineteenth century: anatomy. Although the study of the human body had always been essential to the doctor's practice, before the French Revolution, anatomy was not a formal component of medical education in Western Europe. Instead, the study of anatomy belonged to the lower-ranked realm of the surgeon, which, in the eighteenth century, was an entirely different branch of study. A medical doctor required a degree from a medical school (in Britain, these were Oxford, Cambridge, Edinburgh, or Glasgow); a surgeon was trained through a guild, the Company of Surgeons, which became a separate organization from the Company of Barbers in 1745. The physician, who was of a higher social class, eschewed the bloody reality of dissection, focusing instead on administering medicines (often that he had created himself). But in the early 1790s, medical education was thoroughly re-envisioned in France, prompting a sea-change in other nations' programmes in the decades that followed. In 1790, the medical schools at Paris, Montpellier and Strasbourg were closed completely; when they opened again in 1795, students began with 'dissections, operations, and bandaging' – subjects that had not been covered in medical schools before – and they practised anatomical dissection with the 500 cadavers that were supplied every year to the three schools.[14] Britain closely followed France's reforms in the decades that followed. When the poet John Keats began his training as an apothecary at Guy's Hospital in 1815, he was instructed by Britain's greatest anatomist, Sir Astley Cooper, who said that the doctor's 'anatomical knowledge cannot be perfect unless he has frequently seen and assisted in the dissection of the human body'.*[15] Within every area of medicine, anatomy – as practised through dissection – had become the epistemological basis for the understanding of human biology.

In his dissecting-room injury, the frame narrator of *In a Glass Darkly* is more deeply engaged in the recently reformed world of Romantic medicine than has hitherto been noticed. The haunted bodies whose grisly fates are portrayed in the stories that follow are also shaped more profoundly by historical advances in anatomy. It is telling that Le Fanu's writing career begins and ends with the relationship of anatomy to the supernatural: if *In a Glass Darkly* is one of his last works, his first was 'The Ghost and the Bone Setter', a story from 1838 that is rooted in Romantic-era surgical practice.

In a Glass Darkly manifests the register of Romantic anatomy vividly in its engagement with the historical trope of the dissection of the hand, as the frame narrator's dissecting injury is fraught with symbolic significance. The frame narrator's self-authored case report reads as follows:

> Though carefully educated in medicine and surgery, I have never practised either. The study of each continues, nevertheless, to interest me profoundly. Neither idleness nor caprice caused my secession from the honourable calling which I had just entered. The cause was a very trifling scratch inflicted by a dissecting knife. This trifle cost me the loss of two fingers, amputated promptly, and the more painful loss of my health, for I have never been quite well since, and have seldom been twelve months together in the same place.[16]

While most readers have understood the injury to be a gruesome self-amputation, Richard Haslam (2014) offers a more sophisticated (and in my view, more anatomically probable) reading: the narrator sustained a minor injury during his dissection of a corpse, but the 'trifling scratch' became infected, occasioning the loss of his fingers. In this reading, the contamination by the corpse of the living body sets up the volume's overarching concerns with the permeable boundaries between the living and the dead – not only in 'Green Tea', but even more pronouncedly in 'Carmilla', the vampire story where the titular character transmits her infectious fatal condition by seemingly minor wounds.

The frame narrator's hand injury is loaded with symbolism – but of what, exactly, scholars have differed. Readers have assigned many valences to this symbolic injury. The meaning of the amputated fingers ranges from castration and impotency, to the disembodied hand of the subaltern world within an Irish Gothic tradition, to a deliberate act of self-harm that enabled the narrator to exempt himself from the medical profession and become a wanderer.[17] While these symbols are potent, a simpler explanation may suffice: in my view, if we locate the case history firmly within the history of Romantic-era medicine, the amputated fingers point evocatively to the heightened significance of the dissection of the hand within nineteenth-century anatomical studies. In this period, 'the dissection of the human hand' was understood as an act that would bring 'the anatomist closer to divinity, since both the hand being dissected and the hand performing the dissection were formed by the hand of God'.*[18]

The position of the hand holding the dissecting knife is the same posture as holding a pen, creating an associative link between the anatomizing of a body and the craft of writing. Romantic-era textbooks in the field of morbid anatomy explicitly stated there was a formal connection between dissecting and writing. As the anonymous author of the Romantic medical textbook, *The London Dissector* (1811), detailed, the key skill for doing an autopsy was the correct grip of the knife, analogous to a posture of writing:[19]

> The position of the hand in dissecting should be the same, as in writing and drawing; and the knife, held, like the pen or pencil, by the thumb and the two first fingers, should be moved by means of them only; while the hand rests firmly on the two other fingers bent inwards as in writing, and on the wrist. The instrument can be guided with much more steadiness and precision in this way.[20]

In reflecting on how early nineteenth-century medicine shaped his own critical theory, Michel Foucault takes up this Romantic association between morbid anatomy and textual composition in *Speech Begins After Death* (2013):

> I've transformed the scalpel into a pen. I've gone from the efficacy of healing to the inefficacy of free speech; for the scar on the body I've substituted graffiti on paper; for the ineradicability of the scar I've substituted the perfectly eradicable and expungeable sign of writing . . . For me the sheet of paper may be the body of the other.*[21]

This interchangeability of scalpel and pen is a poignant symbol – and, in 'Green Tea', a historical one. The significance of the amputated fingers in Le Fanu's text draws attention to the new centrality of dissection within the Romantic-era medical curriculum. Meanwhile, the frame narrator's career shift from anatomist to writer comes to read as less unlikely than it might at first seem, given the belief in this period that dissecting and writing constituted a kind of continuous practice.

In contrast to the frame narrator, who is educated and at home in the milieu of Romantic medicine, his mentor Martin Hesselius is firmly situated in the medical practice of an earlier age. The 'immense collection of papers' left by Hesselius to be 'arranged, indexed and bound' by the frame narrator constitutes not just the elder man's diagnostic reports and case histories, but also his correspondence with other physicians. The collection's first story, 'Green Tea', is not written as a private document of Hesselius' botched treatment of Jennings, but it is a text intended for other eyes: the case is 'related in a series of letters to his friend Professor Van Loo of Leyden', who, like Hesselius himself, is Le Fanu's fictional creation. Van Loo is what the Romantics called a 'metapothecary': he is a chemist, 'a man who read history and metaphysics and medicine, and had, in his day, written a play'.[22] Unexpectedly, the frame narrator reveals at the conclusion of 'Green Tea' that Van Loo has also been Hesselius' patient: 'My dear Van L—, you have suffered from an affection similar to that which I have just described . . . Who under God cured you? Your humble servant, Martin Hesselius.'[23] Their epistolary relationship is thus not just a cordial exchange between colleagues, but also one instance in a long doctor–patient exchange, with all its attendant power differentials, that Hesselius and Van Loo had conducted at a distance.

The voluminous correspondence between these professors situates their practice within a real-world Enlightenment scholarly category, the *médecin-philosophe* (doctor-philosopher), who interwove his studies of the human body with the then-dominant literary and philosophical discourse of sensibility. In the eighteenth century, continental physicians such as Charles Bonnet and Théophile de Bordeu communicated by letter to consult with one another over difficult cases and to share new knowledge across fields.[24] The presence of either the doctor's or the patient's body was immaterial to the relationship; as Anne C. Vila notes, some *médecins-philosophes* never actually met one another in person, despite decades of friendly mutual consultation.[25] The disembodiment of their professional relationships reflects how their medical practice, too, was more literary-theoretical than biological. In *In a Glass Darkly*, Hesselius' interests in the porous boundaries between physical and metaphysical explanations of cases can be read as reflective of the late eighteenth-century trend to introduce 'sensibility' – a medial state between the body and the spirit – as a diagnostic category within medicine.

By reading Hesselius within this Enlightenment historical category of *médecins-philosophes*, we glean unexpected insight not just into the repressed intergenerational tensions between the epistemological worlds of the Romantic frame narrator and his eighteenth-century master, but also into the medical experts who would follow the model of Hesselius in later gothic fiction – notably, Bram Stoker's Dr Van Helsing. A 'scientist, physician, and vampirologist' who masterminds the pursuit of Dracula, Van Helsing is, as Robert Tracy notes, a 'more effective Dr Hesselius'.*[26] But, as we learn through his juxtaposition to Hesselius, Stoker's vampire hunter is also a latter-day *médecin-philosophe:* transplanted to the last decades of the nineteenth century, Van Helsing is a throwback to a long-departed phase of medical practice in which the body was perhaps the least important phenomenon in the clinical encounter.

* * *

In a Glass Darkly is indebted to the conventions of Romantic-era medicine not just in thematics, but in form. In addition to the allusions to modernized anatomical training and the epistolary inclusions that point towards the tradition of the *médecin-philosophe*, the collection uses overabundant layers of frame narration – a characteristic feature of the Romantic-era medical report. In the early nineteenth century, the case history was not a genre hermetically contained to the medical field, but a hybrid form that encompassed many traditions, 'borrowing', 'hijacking' and 'poaching' from other fields.*[27] The case history flourished as a medico-literary form following Giovanni Morgagni's *De Sedibus et Causis Morborum* (1761) and William Hunter's *Anatomy of the Gravid Uterus* (1774). Compendia of curious cases collected over the next few decades by Hunter, his younger brother and sometime rival John Hunter, their nephew Matthew Baillie, and other leading Romantic-era physicians were organized in a regular formal pattern that enclosed the patient's narrative within the doctor's expert interpretation.

One essential formal feature of the case histories published by doctors in the Romantic period was the proliferation of layers of paratext. Although medical reporting has always employed paratext, the turn of the nineteenth century saw an intensification of the long-standing trend of framing clinical reports with expert commentary.[28] Case reports from this period did not only offer the story of the clinical proceedings; instead, each report cataloguing the patient's history and the outcome of the case was framed by the clinician's retrospective account of the progress of disease. The specialist's analytical diction surrounded an inner narrative report in the patient's vernacular. In *In a Glass Darkly*, Le Fanu's Hesselius reveals just this sort of layering of professional and personal voices. 'He writes in two distinct characters', comments the frame narrator:

> He describes what he saw and heard as an intelligent layman might, and when in this style of narrative he had seen the patient either through his own hall-door, to the light of day, or through the gates of darkness to the caverns of the dead, he returns upon the narrative, and in the terms of his art, and with all the force and originality of genius, proceeds to the work of analysis, diagnosis, and illustration.*[29]

Bifurcated between his two opposing roles – the intelligent layman and the expert diagnostician – Hesselius' riveting account of Jennings' inset story of the spectral monkey (the innermost layer of 'Green Tea') is related within the frame narrative of his clinical diagnosis in the letters to Van Loo. The third layer of narration is the outermost frame of the story: the prologue by the nameless physician-turned-editor, whose brief account of his workplace injury and his devotion to Hesselius provides shading and context to the case study that follows. In sum, the formal structure of *In a Glass Darkly* is explicitly indebted to the Romantic-era convention of medical reporting through the structural device of frame layering.

Le Fanu's layers of narration are also an inheritance from Romantic fiction as well as medicine. During Romanticism, the boundaries between those categories were not as sharply delineated as they would come to be during Victorianism. Le Fanu's collection of ghost stories is an obvious descendent in a lineage of 'scientific Gothic' that originated in

Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818).[30] *In a Glass Darkly*, like *Frankenstein*, is distinguished by its abundance of narrative frames: all told, Le Fanu has three layers of internally embedded narratives in ‘Green Tea’, to Shelley’s five in *Frankenstein*. The link between Shelley’s and Le Fanu’s books is further supported by the medical characterization of the frame-narrators: like Victor Frankenstein, the editor who frames the story of ‘Green Tea’ is a doctor who never practises medicine. This fungibility between doctors and writers was a historical phenomenon heightened by publishing culture in the Romantic period, which assigned equal value to curious cases witnessed by physicians and dreamt up by writers. As Megan Coyer has shown in her study of *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, medical case reports were published alongside ‘hybrid “medico-popular” stories, *and* purely fictional “Tales of Terror”’.*[31] Whether they originated in medicine or in creative fiction, all these curious cases were given an equal claim to authority by their typesetting, as they were each placed next to one another irrespective of empirical validity.

The structural device of layered narratives that *In a Glass Darkly* inherits from *Frankenstein* was not only drawn from the register of medical case reporting at the turn of the nineteenth century, but also pointed through form to another characteristic concern of the same period: monstrosity. In the Romantic period, monstrosity was understood through tropes of overabundance, redundancy and replicability. Building on Immanuel Kant’s definition of ‘monstrosity’ in the *Critique of Judgment* – something that ‘by its magnitude . . . nullifies the purpose that constitutes its concept’,*[32] the modern scholar Denise Gigante has argued that all excessive ‘proliferation inherent in [Romantic] forms’,* whether corporal or textual, referred implicitly to this theory of the monstrous.[33] Pointing to what Deborah Dixon has called a monstrous ‘upwelling of the flesh’* in Romantic-era science, the abundant, proliferating layers of the era’s medical case histories reflected, on a formal level, the fear of unregulated or unruly bodies that each curious case dealt with on a thematic level.[34] By implicitly including the motif of monstrosity through the formal excessiveness of their layers of narration, the case histories-turned-prose fictions of the Romantic period had the effect of heightening the horror contained within the bounds of their frames.

Although *In a Glass Darkly* was written many decades after the height of the popularity of the Tales of Terror in *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, Le Fanu’s collection reveals the lingering influence of how Romantic medico-literary writers used elaborate layers of frame narratives to contain the supernatural horrors at the heart of their texts, while also hinting through the abundance of form at the motif of monstrous proliferation. In ‘Green Tea’, Le Fanu uses frame narration as a structural device to seal off the supernatural monkey from the reader. The obscene monkey with glowing red eyes is a creature seen only by Jennings, who reports the story to Dr Hesselius, who reports the case to Van Loo, whose correspondence comes many years later into the medical archive inherited by the nameless editor with the injured hand – who then selects the case for inclusion in the book in the reader’s hands. The horror at the centre of the case is contained, neutralized, and offset by the explanatory layers – yet not one of these achieves a satisfactory analysis of the mystery at the case’s centre. At last explaining the title of the story, Hesselius diagnoses the spectral monkey as a hallucination caused by imbibing too much green tea:

> It is the story of a process of a poison, a poison which excites the reciprocal action of spirit and nerve, and paralyses the tissue that separates those cognate functions of the sense, the external and the interior . . . By various abuses, among which the habitual use of such agents as green tea is one, [the cerebral] fluid may be affected as to its quality . . .*[35]

Though Hesselius' explanation to Van Loo is torturously materialistic, the effect of the narrative as a whole is the precise opposite: the mystery resists interpretation. Le Fanu achieves this ghastly effect by means of the artfully wrought layers of medical reporting. What emerges from the collection's mirrored layers is an ironic troubling of the relationship between physician and patient authority. The expert assessment from Hesselius, the physician, frames the personal account of Jennings, the patient, implying a distinction between Jennings' unreliable testimony and the stated authority of the doctor ('I have never yet failed', Hesselius writes).*[36] And yet, the physician's authority is thrown into doubt by the copiousness – and implied monstrosity – of how this story is presented. 'Fifty-seven such cases have I encountered',* repeats Hesselius – but this one remains stubbornly untreatable by him, even as he insists that spectral illusions are treatable diseases.[37] At the conclusion of the story, as he writes to Van Loo, his own erstwhile patient, for a second opinion, Hesselius is transformed from the authority to the sufferer – an irony that undermines his materialist explanations. In the end, the layers of Le Fanu's frame narrative in 'Green Tea' sit uneasily with one another, with the effect of disturbing rather than reinforcing the doctor's authority. Instead, the physician's and patient's roles are collapsed into one another and beneath the weight of the unresolved symbol of the demonic monkey, which remains outside the bounds of materialist explanation at the end of the case.

While Le Fanu intermittently recruits Hesselius to offer other brief moments of pseudo-medical framing throughout the rest of *In a Glass Darkly*, by the close of the first story, the horrifying effect has already been achieved. No matter how historically accurately Hesselius presents his cases, this expert physician proves to be no match for the mystery that plagues Jennings and haunts the reader long after the story is concluded. Le Fanu's recruitment of Romantic-era medical registers (both thematic and formal) has the opposite effect from the one his doctor-writer seems to intend. Hesselius' lapse from objectivity and empiricism in the opening to personal appeals and self-defensiveness in the conclusion produces an effect of horror – though perhaps not the horror the reader expected. The story is not merely a tale of simian demonic possession; at a deeper level, it is an account of how a medical master loses his pretensions to expertise.

In a heretofore unacknowledged debt to Romantic medicine, Le Fanu borrows his thematic concerns (the rise of anatomy and pathology and the decline of the *médecin-philosophe*) and his formal devices (the amply layered case history) from characteristic parts of the physician's practice in the early nineteenth century. Yet far from supporting the efforts of his doctor-narrator to solve the mystery, this hidden context from Romantic medicine affords Le Fanu the scaffolding for a very different kind of horror story: the gothic ironizing of medical authority.

Notes

1. James 1999: 321.
2. Sullivan 1978: 11, 6, 12, cited in Haslam 2014. I am very grateful to Richard Haslam for providing me with a personal copy of his essay, 'The Editor's Amputated Fingers: Le Fanu's "Green Tea" and the "Chasm" Between Inference and Evidence', originally published in the online journal *Le Fanu Studies* in 2014 and quoted repeatedly since then. Following the death of its editor, *Le Fanu Studies* no longer exists online, and Haslam's essay (as well as other essential work from *Le Fanu Studies* quoted in his paper) cannot be accessed. Haslam's essay provides a sweeping and thorough summary of all previous readings of 'Green Tea', and my survey here is greatly in his debt. Note that Haslam's essay, like other essays in *Le Fanu Studies*, has no pagination.
3. Le Fanu 2008: 8.
4. Le Fanu 2008: 5.
5. Le Fanu 2008: 38.
6. Le Fanu 2008: 39.
7. Le Fanu 2008: 5.
8. Le Fanu 2008: 6.
9. Le Fanu 2008: 6.
10. Dalrymple 2007: 957.
11. Cooke 2011, cited in Haslam 2014.
12. The following are all quoted in Haslam 2014: see Nally 2009, Woolf 2006, Hay 2011, DeCuir 2014.
13. Le Fanu 2008: 22–3, Ito 2014: 87.
14. Vess 1975: 133 *passim*; cf. Hegele 2022: 36, 38–9.
15. Cited in Goellnicht 1984: 28; cf. Hegele 2022: 39.
16. Le Fanu 2008: 5.
17. These thematic groupings all appear in Haslam 2014: see DeCuir 2000, Girard 2006, McCorristine 2009, Killeen 2009.
18. Hegele 2022: 40, cf. Rowe 1997: 303.
19. Cf. Hegele 2022: 73.
20. *The London Dissector* 1811: 1.
21. Foucault 2013: 39.
22. Le Fanu 2008: 6; cf. Hegele 2022: 6.
23. Le Fanu 2008: 38.
24. Hegele 2022: 6.
25. Vila 1998: 64.
26. Tracy 2008: xxi.
27. Kennedy 2000: 4 n. 5, 28.
28. Tweed and Scott 2018: 1.
29. Le Fanu 2008: 5–6.
30. Kennedy 2010: 2; cf. Hegele 2022: 153.

31. Coyer 2017: 21.
32. Kant 1987: 109.
33. Gigante 2009: 200; cf. Hegele 2022: 174.
34. Dixon 2015: 8; cf. Hegele 2022: 174.
35. Le Fanu 2008: 37–9.
36. Le Fanu 2008: 39.
37. Le Fanu 2008: 38.

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INDEX LOCORUM

Aelius Theon

Progymnasmata	
Spengel p. 109	171

Aeschylus

Agamemnon	
813–16	61
827–8	61
1085–97	62
1388–92	62
Eumenides	
34	81
34–63	9–10
41–3	63
1243	81

Apuleius

Golden Ass	
1.7	123
1.8	123
1.9	123
1.10	127 n. 39
1.12	115
1.13	123
2.5	123
3.21	123
8.24	119
8.26	119–20, 127 n. 32
8.27–8	120–1
8.29	121

Aristotle

History of Animals	
486a1–14	14
Parts of Animals	
1.5	195
Poetics	
1449b23–9	75
1453b 1–11	69

Ausonius

Cupid Crucified	
Praefatio	123
1	124
4	124
5	124
65–6	124
72–4	124
80	124
82	124
84–7	124
88	124
89	124
90	124
93–6	124
97–8	124
99–100	124

Catullus

15	122
63	117

Cicero

Pro Roscio	
11	98–9
12	99
16	99–100
33	101
63	105
66	107
91	102

Clement of Alexandria

Stromateis	
II.8.40, 1–3	194

Euripides

Bacchae	
1200–1	68
1203	68
1238	68
1280	68–9
1300	69
Electra	
855–7	67
Hippolytus	
1265	66
1342–4	66
Medea	
1313–15	66

Phoenissae
1409–22 65

Galen
Anatomical Demonstrations
9.11 197
12.7 183
On the usefulness of the parts
1.22 184
Recognizing the Best Physician
9.6 183–4
Simple Medicines
10 Proem 183–4

Gorgias
Helen
9 76

[Hippocrates]
Epidemics
2.2.19 196
On Breaths
1 19, 194

Homer
Iliad
11.146–7 56
Odyssey
9.290–5 161
9.475–6 48
10.200 48
22.326–9 48
22.344 54

Horace
Epodes
3 127 n. 35

John Chrysostom
PG
51.55 177–8
[John Chrysostom]
63.565 178

Libanius
Against a Murderer
1.7–8 168
1.8–9 168
1.31 170

[Longinus]
On the Sublime
38.3 8

Lucan
Civil War
6.413–830 115
6.435–506 127 n. 38
6.507–830 127 n. 38
9.619–889 115

Lucretius
On the Nature of Things
2.1–6 126 n. 16

Ovid
Metamorphoses
2.358–63 16, 29–30
4.121–7 137
5.123–7 140
6.549–62 135–6
8.741–878 127 n. 33
10.189–95 134
10.298–502 124
10.300 124
12.245–53 140
12.265–70 141
13.385–92 141

Petronius
Satyricon
19 115, 118
20 118
21 115, 119
23 119
24 119
133 121
134 121
135 122
138 122

PGM
IV 2441–55 218
IV 2455–71 225
IV 2471–99 222
IV 2505–19 223–4
IV 2574–92 227
XII 51–5 217
XII 107–9 216
XXXVI 264–74 230–1

Philo of Alexandria
On the Embassy to Gaius
266–7 23–4

Plato
Gorgias
502b–c 74
Ion
535c 76
Republic
439e–440a 24

Pliny the Younger
Epistles
7.27 115

Plutarch
Artaxerxes
14.5 6
Crassus
26 7
On the soul
fr. 178 7

Pollux
Onomasticon
4.128 66

Quintilian
Institutio oratoria
6.2.31 97
9.2.53 104
[Quintilian]
Major Declamations
8.19 179

Seneca
Thyestes
641–9 144–5
650–6 145–6
665–79 147–8
707–13 150–1
776–88 153
973 36
999–1004 36

Sophocles
Oedipus at Colonus
140–1 81
Oedipus Tyrannus
1306 81
Trachiniae
674–8 63
697–702 63
1053–7 64

Statius
Thebaid
7.794–6 36–7
816–18 36–7
820–3 36–7

Thucydides
History of the Peloponnesian War
2.49.2 8
2.52.2 8

Virgil
Aeneid
2.12 115
6.887 124
9.431–7 134

Vita Aeschyli
7 70, 78
9 70, 78
14 78

INDEX RERUM ET NOMINUM

abject 73 n. 47, 95, 123, 215, 228–9, 231, 237–9, 240 n. 3
Aelius Theon 171, 174 n. 47
Aeschylus 9–12
  Oresteia 60, 61–3, 67–9, 71 nn.14/16/18, 73 n. 40
  Agamemnon 61–2, 67, 70 n. 3, 71 nn.16/19, 72 n. 20, 73 nn. 40/41/45, 81, 84, 162
  Libation Bearers 15, 63, 67, 71 n. 19, 84
  Eumenides 9–13, 55, 78, 81
  Prometheus Bound 84, 86
  Seven Against Thebes 84
  ancient lives of 77–8
aesthetics 8, 12, 17–18, 28, 32, 33, 34, 37, 40, 42, 48, 59, 61, 63, 70, 93, 111 n. 41, 130, 131, 144, 177, 193, 135, 136, 228.
affect 2, 3, 5, 9, 23, 28, 29, 31, 33, 38, 43 n. 15, 45 n. 32, 96, 97, 203, 204
  affective energy 147, 157 n. 43
Agamemnon 144, 158 n. 69
Agathocles 216
agōgai, ἀγωγαί (‘attraction producers’) *see* magic(al)
agōgima, ἀγώγιμα (‘attraction producers’) *see* magic(al)
agony 15, 65, 72 n. 28, 84, 177, 184
agrupnētika, ἀγρυπνητικά (‘sleeplessness-producers’) *see* magic(al)
Aktiōphis, Ἀκτιῶφις (epithet of Selene) 222–4, 242 n. 17, 243 n. 41
Alexander, J. 96
Alexandria 180
amaurōseis, ἀμαυρώσεις (‘invisibility procedures’) *see* magic(al)
amazement 7, 11, 61, 70, 181
  see also wonder
Amphiaraus 36–7
anatomy 6–7, 14, 20, 22, 175, 180–3, 189, 195–6, 202, 205, 221, 247, 249, 255
  anatomical dissection (*see* dissection)
  see also Romanticism
androphonos, ἀνδροφόνος (‘man-killing’, ‘man-killer’) 164, 167, 170, 173 n. 19
anēr hieros, ἀνήρ ἱερός (‘holy man’) 221
anger 3, 86, 95, 97, 150–1, 152, 158 n. 71, 167, 212 n. 82, 218
  see also ira
Anjum, Phillip Luis 202, 210 nn. 57/58
annihilation 11, 12, 29, 32, 64, 83, 88, 89, 109 n. 12
Annihilation 29–31, 43 n. 13
anonymity 100–4, 106
anthropophagy (men-eating) 47, 48, 54, 55, 161, 162
Antiphon 165, 166, 173 nn. 16/19
Aphrodite / Venus 4, 86, 117, 124, 125, 219, 242 n.17
Aphthonius the Sophist 171
apokteinō, ἀποκτείνω (‘I kill’) 168, 174 n. 40
aposphattō, ἀποσφάττω (‘I cut the throat of’) 168, 170
Apuleius 115–21, 123–4, 125 n. 8, 126 n. 9, 126 n. 12, 127 nn. 38/39, 127 nn. 40/41, 176–7, 182–3
arena, spectacles in 176, 178, 182
areopagus 165, 166
Aristophanes 70, 73 n. 36, 84
Aristotle 3, 11, 12, 14, 15, 18, 21, 60, 63, 69–71, 195–6, 215
  biology 14, 181
  Nicomachean Ethics 207 n. 10
  on tragedy 60–1, 63, 69–70, 71 nn. 8/10, 74 nn. 56/60, 75–7, 89–90
  On the Soul 207 n. 10
  Parts of Animals 195, 208 n. 29
  Poetics 12, 21, 60, 69–70*,* 75–7, 89–90, 172 n. 1
  Politics 75, 190 n. 2
  Rhetoric 75, 190 n. 2, 207 n. 10, 211 n. 71
Artemis 217
Athens 9, 88, 144, 163, 165, 166, 167, 171, 173 n. 19, 174 n. 31
Atreus 143–7, 149–52, 154–8
Attalus III 220, 229
audience 11, 12, 18, 21, 24 n. 29, 29, 30–1, 36, 42 nn. 1/2, 44 n. 22, 45 n. 27, 45–6 n. 36, 95–108, 197, 218–20
Ausonius 118, 123–4, 127 n. 43

beheading 47, 48, 54, 94, 100, 102, 219, 222
  see also decapitation

Bennett, Jane 143, 145, 152, 156 n. 26, 158 n. 75, 159 n. 76
Berlioz, Hector 189–91, 193
biology 14, 22, 45 n. 26, 181, 208 n. 20, 250
Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine 254
blood 1, 10, 11, 14–17, 21, 27, 29–30, 34, 99, 105, 107, 132, 134–8, 141 n. 49, 142 n. 75, 171, 174 n. 47, 215, 222, 226, 228, 230–9, 243 n. 68, 245 n. 88
  bloodletting 178
  cruor 129, 133–4, 137, 141 n. 52
  fear of (hemophobia) 197, 202
  haima, αἷμα (blood) 49, 52, 53, 54, 59, 61–5, 67–8, 71 nn.14/16/17/18/19, 72 n. 21, 73 n. 41, 74 n. 53, 222, 226, 229, 232, 244 nn. 72/85
  menstrual, of a dead virgin (ἰχῶρα παρθένου νεκρᾶς) 227
  see also ink
body 216, 217, 221–2, 223–4, 228–9, 238, 239
  bodily beauty 51, 52, 54–5, 116, 125
  components of 60, 61–6
  bodily fluid(s) 12, 14–15, 16, 20, 22, 71 n. 18, 137–8, 177, 215, 226, 228–9, 231, 238, 255
  fragmented 68–9, 143, 152–3, 158 n. 74, 159 n. 78
  horrific 60, 61–6, 68, 130, 149–53
  horror 31, 42 n. 5, 43 nn. 8/14, 115, 161, 162, 172
  suffering 30–1, 37, 60, 61, 63, 71 n. 15, 133–6
  wounded 30, 68, 133–6
  dismemberment 60, 64, 69, 74 n. 52, 80, 87, 170
  see also mutilation
Boethus, Flavius, Roman consul 180, 183
Bracha, H. Stefan 193, 207 n. 16
Bubb, Claire 18, 197, 220, 242 n. 25
bureaucracy 192
Burke, Edmund 8
Burke, William and Hare, William 175

Caesar 130, 134, 135
Cairns, Douglas 5
Callimachus 127 n. 33, 211 n. 71
Cannae, battle of 102
Carpenter, John 202
Carroll, Noël 3, 33–5, 36–8, 40, 42 nn. 2/3, 44 nn. 21/22/23, 45 n. 32, 45–6 n. 36, 46 n. 37
Caruth, Cathy 96
Celsus, Aulus Cornelius 179–80, 202, 210 n. 59
centaur(s) 133, 141 n. 50
Chalchanthos, χάλκανθος (vitriol, gree; iron (ii) sulphate) 232–4, 235, 243 n. 68, 244 n. 79, 244 n. 85
charitēsia, χαριτήσια ('charisma procedures') *see* magic(al)
Chorus 144, 150, 152, 154, 159 n. 79
Christian(s) 167, 177–8, 194, 206, 208 n. 23
Chrysostom, John 177–8
ps.-Chrysostom, John 178
Cicero, Marcus Tullius 15, 93–113
  Ad Familiares 7.1.3, 187 n. 48
  Tusculanae Disputationes 207 n. 10
cinaedus, *kinaidos* 4, 117–20, 125, 126 nn. 18/21/24/28/29
civil war 93–113
  Sulla's 93–4
  effects of 95–6
Classics, classical 12, 23 n. 16
Clement of Alexandria (Titus Flavius Clemens) 194
Cleopatra VII 220, 241 n. 15
Cloelius Terracinensis 106
Cohen, Jeffrey Jerome 143, 157 n. 48
comedy 1, 78, 79, 84, 115, 116–18, 122, 125, 161, 177, 186 n. 18
  see also humour
compassion 83, 162, 183, 187 n. 48, 212 n. 82
  see also empathy
competitions, medical
  see medical
computer tomography (CT) 198
Covid-19 pandemic 189, 202, 205, 208 n. 18, 210 n. 52, 212 nn. 73/74
  see also horror
Craven, Wes 202
crime 46 n. 37, 71 n. 5, 90 n. 16, 98, 99, 101, 103–6, 163, 164, 165, 166, 167, 169, 170, 171, 172, 173 n. 19
  criminals 103–7, 164, 167, 171, 175, 178, 182, 220
cruor 15, 129, 133–4, 137, 141 n. 52
  see also blood
Cyclops/Cyclopes 47, 48, 49, 50, 55, 131–2, 140 n. 34, 161, 171
  see also Polyphemus

daimones, δαίμονες (daemons) 72 n. 29, 215, 217, 218, 224, 228, 329
danger 3, 8, 21, 33, 36, 45 n. 28, 69, 78, 96, 99, 100, 102, 105, 125, 145, 162, 167, 171, 181, 224
death
  death drive 21
  dying, being killed *passim*
  thematised 1, 4, 7, 16, 19, 21, 22, 59, 60, 63, 70 n. 3, 71 n. 5, 71 n. 1, 73 n. 46, 74 n. 54, 93, 96, 116, 134–5, 143, 161, 179, 189, 190, 195, 217, 222, 224
    see also agony
decapitation 18, 48,49, 50, 54, 55, 65, 158 n. 69, 176
  see also beheading, dismemberment, mutilation
decay 3, 14, 15, 19, 95
  see also body, putrefaction

Decknamen (code names) 226
defence 36, 93, 104, 164, 165, 173 nn. 18/19, 193
deinos, *deinon*, δεινός, δεινόν (‘dreadful, terrible, wonderful’) 3, 47, 207 n. 10, 162, 167, 170, 172 n. 4, 229–30
delectatio (‘delight’, ‘pleasure’, ‘amusement’) 130, 138
della Porta, Giambattista 118
Delphinion 164, 165
Demonsthenes 173 nn. 14/20, 174 nn. 32/45
diakopoi, διακοποί (procedures to produce discord between people) *see* magic(al)
dictatorship 93–4
Diodorus Siculus 208 n. 31
disease 19, 29, 72 n. 25, 83, 181, 189, 195, 200, 203, 229, 253, 255
  see also illness, pathology
disgust 28–9, 32–4, 37–9, 44 n. 22, 45 nn. 32/33, 46 n. 38, 115, 118, 120, 123, 125, 126 n. 12, 136, 161, 170, 172 n. 2
dissection 14, 18, 20, 150, 152, 159 n. 78, 189, 212 n. 78, 220–1, 223, 249, 250, 251
  of humans 175, 182
  of animals 175, 180–1
  see also anatomy, vivisection, Romanticism
Djedi 219, 221
doctors 14, 18–20, 83, 171, 174 n. 40, 175, 177–86, 189–92, 200, 205, 215, 220, 248, 250, 252–3, 254–5
domus Pelopia (the House of Pelops) 143–51, 153–8
Draco 163, 164, 166, 174 n. 32, 215, 220
dream 15, 105, 216–21, 229, 241 n. 10
  see also nightmares
Dreckapotheke 215, 219, 226, 228–9, 239

Echo 14
Egypt 238, 241 n. 15
  Egyptian 215, 217, 219–21, 224–7, 232, 238–9, 240 n. 5
ekkyklema /ἐκκύκλημα (theatrical machine displaying dead bodies) 60, 66, 68, 69
ekplēxis (‘surprise, terrified astonishment’) *see* fear
ektheōsis, ἐκθέωσις (‘make divine’) *see* magic(al)
elephants 187 n. 48
emotion(s) 2–3, 31–40
  emotional trauma 94–6, 193, 211 n. 64
  medical 203, 210 n. 62
  negative 36, 45 n. 28, 97–8, 161–2, 169, 171
  see also anger empathy, fear, pity, tragedy
empathy, empathetic, empathising 19, 59, 60, 69, 95, 97, 168, 178, 182, 187 n. 48, 187 n. 49, 189, 193, 195, 200, 203–6, 208 nn. 26/28
  see also compassion
Empiricists (medical sect) 180
empura, ἔμπυρα (‘inflaming procedures’) *see* magic(al)
enargeia (‘vividness of description’) 7, 96, 98, 100, 102, 108
energy
  affective 147
  expressive 97–8
enphobos, ἔνφοβος (‘state of fear’) 217
entromos, ἔντρομος (‘state of trembling’) 217
enucleation 132–3, 138
environment 14, 22, 47, 93, 97, 98, 102–3, 150
epideixis, ἐπίδειξις (‘display’) 216, 219–21, 223, 231, 239
epithuma, ἐπίθυμα (‘incense offering’) 219, 220, 225–7
Erasistratus 180
Ereškigal Ερεσχιγαλ 222, 242 n. 17
Erichtho 115, 121, 123, 127 n. 38, 176–7, 182–3
Erinyes 9–12, 21, 78, 81
  see also Furies
Eros/eros, erotic 83, 115, 123, 129, 136, 217
  torture 219, 223, 224
ethics 17, 48, 89, 179
Eudemus, Peripatetic philosopher 180
euidentia 96–103, 132–3, 136, 138
  see also enargeia
Euripides
  Bacchae 55, 65, 68, 72 nn. 30/33, 74 nn. 51/53, 124, 162
  Electra 67, 73 n. 38
  Hecuba 65
  Heracles 64–5, 66–7
  Hippolytus 66
  Medea 64, 66, 72 n. 31, 127 n. 40
  Phoenician Women 65–6
  Suppliant Women 86
  Trojan Women 79, 91 n. 22
Euryalus 134–5

faeces 215, 225–6, 227, 228, 229
fainting 11, 67, 78, 134, 193, 197, 200, 202
fear 2–3, 6, 27–8, 32–40, 44 nn. 22/25, 45 nn. 26/32/34/35, 46 nn. 38/39, 115, 118, 120, 130, 135, 161–2, 170, 171, 215–16, 217, 230, 238–9, 245 n. 88
  death from 178
  deidō, δείδω (‘I fear’, ‘I dread’) 162
  dread 2
  ekplēxis (‘surprise, terrified astonishment’) 3, 12, 77–8
  hemophobia (‘fear of blood’) *see* blood
  fright 9, 10, 11, 33, 83, 124, 131, 193, 198, 202, 207 nn. 10/16, 208 n. 31, 225
  modern vs ancient 3
  metus (‘fear/dread’) 2, 38, 192, 207 n. 10

  - *pavor* ('trembling/shaking, fear/fright') 38, 207 n. 10
  - *phobos* ('fear') 2–3
  - terror 2, 32–4, 37–8, 42 n. 6, 44 nn. 18/24, 45 n. 32, 117–19, 207 n. 10, 217
  - *timor* ('fear') 2, 38, 207 n. 10
  - *see also enphobos*, *entromos,* freeze
- female 4, 71 n. 11, 78, 117, 123, 197, 247
  - *see also* gender
- feminism 5
- fiction 3, 6, 12, 19–23, 32, 36, 39, 41, 42 n. 2, 44 n. 21, 59, 103, 126 n. 23, 167, 170–3, 175, 247–8, 252–4
- fight 8, 30, 54, 96, 119, 156 n. 18, 193, 195, 207 n. 16
- Fimbria, Caius Flavius 100–1
- final girl 103
- fish 181
- flora 14
  - *see also* plants
- flesh 61–2, 63–4, 229
- flight 23 n. 7, 32, 36, 193, 207 n. 16
- fluid(s), bodily
  - *see* body
- focalization 98–9
- focalizer 72
- *Forum Romanum* 98–103, 108, 109 n. 13, 111 n. 45, 176
- Foucault, Michel 251
- Frankenstein, Dr 27, 42 n. 1, 116, 175, 193, 254
- freeze 193
- Freud, Sigmund 21, 123
- fright *see* fear
- frog(s) 52, 181
- Furies 21, 61, 63, 67–8, 104, 106–7, 172 n. 4
  - *see also* Erinyes

- Gaia 146
- Galen of Pergamon 18, 26 n. 45, 158, 178, 180–5, 196, 220–3, 228–30, 238, 239
- gaze 31, 101, 122, 134, 177, 204
- *Gebrauchstexte* (utilitarian texts) 240 n. 6
- gender 4, 72 n. 25, 78, 117, 125, 126 n. 21, 224
- genre 1, 10, 11, 15, 20, 22, 24 n. 29, 28–33, 39–41, 42 n. 6, 43 n. 8, 44 n. 20, 60, 70, 74 n. 61, 75, 76, 77, 89, 93, 95, 106, 110 n. 21, 115–18, 129, 130, 132–3, 161, 175–6, 186 n. 18, 217, 253
- Germania 182
- goats 183–5
- *gonē*, γονή (semen) 226, 228, 229, 238
- Gleason, Maude 176
- Goethe, J. W. 84, 221
  - *Der Zauberlehrling* 221
- Gorgias 76, 90 n. 10
  - *Helen* 76
- Gothic 29, 32, 42 n. 7, 43 n. 8, 43 n. 14, 44 nn. 16/19, 60, 61, 67, 193, 247–57
  - 'scientific' 253
- grave 27, 97, 202
  - robbery 175–6
  - *see also* tomb
- 'Green Tea'
  - dating of 249
  - Martin Hesselius 247, 249, 252
  - medical readings of 249
  - narrator of 250, 251, 252
- grotesque, 16, 34, 46 n. 39, 115, 122, 123, 131, 133, 137
- grove 30, 145–50, 152–3, 155–6
- guilt 9, 18, 84, 87, 93, 96, 103–8, 166, 170, 173 n. 16, 205
  - collective 103–4
  - allocation of 103
- guts 11, 36, 59, 60, 61–9, 115, 162
  - *see also* innards, viscera

- Hadrian 216, 218–19, 220, 223, 227, 228, 239
- *haima*, αἷμα (blood) *see* blood
- Harpies 11–12
- haunting 17, 20, 27, 59, 61, 93, 95, 97, 100, 102, 107, 115, 124, 136, 177, 247, 250, 255
- health, healthy 19, 116, 145, 146, 178, 180, 192, 205, 250
- healthcare
  - professional 193, 204–6, 211 n. 67, 212 n. 75
  - *see also* doctors
- Hecate 219, 242 n. 17
- Heidegger, Martin 2
  - *unheimlich* ('uncanny') 2
- Heliades 29–31
- Heliopolis 216, 218, 220
- hemophobia (fear of blood) *see* blood
- *hermēneumata*, ἑρμηνεύματα ('interpretations') 226
- Hermogenes 171
- Herodotus 15, 56 n. 14, 208 n. 31
- Herophilus 180
- Hesselius, Martin 20, 247–9, 252
- Hippocrates, Hippocratic 19, 194–6, 203, 208 nn. 25/28/30, 209 nn. 32/36, 210 n. 62
- Hobbes, Thomas 125, 127 n. 47
- Holmes, Brooke 194–6, 203, 208 nn. 25/28/30, 209 nn. 32/36, 210 n. 62
- Homer 7, 163, 167, 172
  - *Iliad* 49, 50–2, 65, 162, 177, 207 n. 16
  - *Odyssey* 17, 46 n. 40, 47–61, 163
    - suitors 48, 50, 52, 53, 56, 163
- homicide 64, 97, 163–4, 165–6, 167, 169, 170–2, 173 n. 16, 173 n.19, 174 n. 32
  - *see also* murder
- *horrescere* ('to be horrified') 28, 36

horridus ('horrible') 28
horror, horrere ('to bristle', 'to tremble/shudder at', 'to dread') 5, 16, 38, 77, 94–5, 97–8, 99–103, 104–6, 108, 115, 123, 131–3, 135–8, 161
horror 2, 28, 38, 45 n. 35, 46 n. 39, 115, 119, 121, 123–5, 125 n. 1, 125 n. 4, 161, 165, 167, 169, 170, 171–2, 172 n. 2, 172 n. 5
  cosmic 31, 31 n. 14, 34–5, 34 n. 25, 37, 105–6
    see also Lovecraft, H. P.
  and Covid 200
  Darwin on 79
  definition of 27–9, 31–40, 77, 130, 135–6, 139 n. 22, 139 n. 25
  environmental 30, 43 n. 14, 115, 130–2
  facial expression of 78–9
  film 27–9, 32, 42 n. 6, 42–3 n. 7, 43 n. 8, 44 n. 24, 59–60, 70 n.1, 70 n.3
  Gothic 60, 61, 67
  horrorism 27, 42 n. 4
  locus horridus 98–103, 143–4, 146, 148, 155, 157
  medical 175, 189, 192–4, 197, 200, 202–3, 205–6, 207 n. 11/13, 212 n. 77
  modern vs ancient 3
  physical 63–4, 67–8, 70, 130–1, 132–8, 144, 161
  Rooms of Horrors / Errors 205, 212 n. 76
  supernatural 34–6, 43 n. 8, 115, 130, 215, 217, 222–3, 224–5, 226, 231, 238–9, 240 n.3
  terminology of
    Greek 2–3
    Latin 2–3, 77
    see also horror, horrere, horrescere, horridus
  texts
  theatrical 64, 66–70
  tragic 61, 63, 106–7
  triple 198, 200, 209 n. 49
  useful 20–1
  verbal 63–4, 66, 68–9, 133–6
  visual 60, 61–4, 66–70, 72 n. 24, 72 n. 27, 72 n. 30, 135–8
  vs fear 32–7, 77, 89–90, 115, 130–2
  see also body
horrorism (*see* horror)
humour 4, 15, 45 n. 31, 45 n. 31, 59, 115–19, 122, 125, 125 n. 4, 132, 138, 183–5
Hyacinthus 134–5, 137
hybrid 4, 16, 60, 116, 131, 131, 133, 253, 254
  hybridization 16, 129, 131, 138
hyperbole/ *hyperbole* 3, 8, 46 n. 38, 104, 117–18, 172 n. 7

Iliad see Homer
illness 15, 83, 165, 179, 202, 219, 221, 224, 229
  see also disease, pathology
imagination 4, 59, 82, 96–8, 100, 102, 176, 196
imago agens / imagines agentes 131–2, 136, 138
incest, incestuous 16, 71 n. 5, 124, 133, 135–6, 138, 144, 179
infants 182
  exposed 71 n. 5, 182
  infanticide 90 n. 16, 156 n. 30
infection 68, 103, 104, 106–7, 169, 178, 202, 250, 251
infernal creatures 148–9, 152–4
ingrown toenails (*Unguis incarnatus*) 200–1, 210 n. 50–1
ink 230–9
  blood 216, 230–9
  carbon 232, 233, 234, 236–7
  iron-gall 232, 233, 234, 236, 243 n. 68, 244 n. 85
  magic 217
  myrrh (*zmurnomelan*, ζμυρνομέλαν) 216, 230–1, 232, 233, 234, 236, 244 n. 70, 244 n. 75, 244 n. 77, 244 n. 79
innards 181
  see also guts, viscera
insanity 68, 81, 100–1, 104, 107
ira ('anger') 151–2, 158 n. 71
iunx, ἴυγξ (wryneck, magical wheel) 218, 241 n. 15

Jesus Christ 178, 194, 204, 207 n. 15, 211 n. 71
jouissance 21

kakourgos, κακοῦργος ('evil-doer') 164, 173 n. 19
Kant, Immanuel 117, 126 n. 16, 204, 211 n. 65, 211 n. 66
  Critique of Judgement 15, 117, 126 n. 16, 254
  Metaphysics of Morals, Doctrine of Virtue 204
Kazantzidis, George 203, 206 nn. 2–4, 207 n. 14, 208 nn. 25–6/30, 209 n. 36
Khufu (Cheops) 219, 221
King, Stephen 3–4, 32–5, 40, 42 n. 1, 44 nn. 18/19/20/23, 46 nn. 38/40
knowledge 1, 7, 14, 15, 21–3, 35, 45 n. 34, 95, 98, 183, 221, 222, 224–5
kolasis phrenōn, κόλασις φρενῶν ('torment of the heart') 223

lamella 224
landscape 6, 13, 14, 16, 27, 30, 41, 108, 131–2, 143–4, 148–55, 157
Lapithae, Lapith(s) 133, 140 n. 48
Latinus (King) 143–4
Latour, Bruno 143, 146, 156 n. 37, 146 n. 39
law(s) 18, 93–4, 103, 143–4, 161, 163–4, 165–6, 167, 168, 170, 170–1, 172 n. 7, 173 n. 13, 174 n. 32, 228
Leodes 48–56
Libanius 7, 161–74 *passim*
Livy 208 n. 31

locus amoenus 144, 148
locus horrendous 157 n. 44
locus horridus 98–103, 143–4, 146, 148, 155, 157
logoi, λόγοι (*formulae,* spells) *see* magic(al)
London Dissector, The (1811) 251
ps.-Longinus, *On the Sublime* 8
Lovecraft H. P. 6, 34–8, 40, 43 n. 14, 44 n. 25, 45 n. 26, 118, 215, 217, 229, 238–9, 240 n. 2
Lucan 108, 110 nn. 15/20, 112 nn. 53/63, 176, 179
  Bellum Civile 43, n. 9, 115, 121, 123, 127 n. 38, 129, 133, 138, 162, 172 n. 7
Lucian 221
Lysias 165, 173 n. 18

macabre 16, 32, 132–3, 135–8, 139 n. 25, 158 n. 69, 179
madness 2, 15, 61, 64, 72 n. 32, 104, 107, 117, 223
  see also insanity
magic(al)
  agōgai, ἀγωγαί ('attraction producers') 218, 223–4, 241 n. 15
  agōgima, ἀγώγιμα ('attraction producers') 218
  agrupnētika, ἀγρυπνητικά ('sleeplessness-producers') 218, 223
  amaurōseis, ἀμαυρώσεις ('invisibility procedures') 218
  charitēsia, χαριτήσια ('charisma procedures') 218
  diakopoi, διακοποί ('procedures to produce discord between people') 218
  ektheōsis, ἐκθέωσις ('make divine') 225, 226
  empura, ἔμπυρα ('inflaming procedures') 218, 222–3
  epanankos logos, ἐπάναγκος λόγος ('coercive spell') 226–7
  epilogoi, ἐπίλογοι ('spells') 218, 220
  epōidai, ἐπῳδαί ('incantations') 218
  with erotic purpose 165
  ink 217, 232
  katadesmoi, κατάδεσμοι ('bindings') 230
  logoi, λόγοι (*formulae,* spells) 218, 222–3, 225, 242 n. 17
  mageia, μαγεία ('magic')
  Greek magical papyri 215, 218, 219, 240 n. 5, 241 n. 10, 243 n. 42
  materia magica 176, 181–2, 218, 224, 225, 226, 227, 228
  oneiropompoi, ὀνειροπομποί ('dream-senders') 216–17, 218, 220, 221, 229–30, 241 n. 10
  pharmaka 173 n. 19
  philtra, φίλτρα ('love charms') 165, 215
  philtrokatadesmoi, φιλτροκατάδεσμοι ('love-bindings') 218
  phylaktēria, φυλακτήρια ('phylacteries') 218, 219, 223–5
  posima, πόσιμα ('potions') 218
  potēria, ποτήρια ('potions') 218
  sorcery 181–2, 215, 219, 221, 241
  teletē, τελεταί ('rites') 218
  thumokatokha, θυμοκάτοχα (procedures for restraining someone's anger) 218
  voces magicae ('magic words') 217
  see also witchcraft, witches, *iunx*
male 14, 71 n. 11, 73 n. 46, 82, 117, 122, 193
  see also gender
Marius, C. jun. 101
Marius, C. sen. 100
Mark (evangelist) 205, 207 n. 15, 211 n. 71
mass (of people) 11, 12, 42 n. 6, 59, 70, 74 n. 60, 102, 106, 173 n. 14, 202
materia magica see magic(al)
material, materiality 14, 15, 22, 116, 117, 118, 137, 144, 158 n. 76, 165, 216, 218, 223, 226, 227, 229, 234, 238, 239, 245 n. 88
matricide 59, 62, 71 n. 5
matter 14–15, 19, 22, 30, 232
Medea 66, 81, 90 n. 16, 107, 121–3, 127 nn. 35/40, 136, 144
medical
  competition 183–4, 221
  emotion 203, 210 n. 62
  fear, overcoming 208 n. 23
  horror (*horror medicinalis*) *see* horror, medical
    overcoming of 19, 115, 122, 127 n. 39, 201, 205
  meeting room 198
  philosopher 247, 252, 253
  readings of 4
  report 12
  resilience 204–5
  science 18–19
  secondary stress, overcoming 205
  tools 18, 178, 185
medicine, 11, 15, 19, 20, 22, 72 n. 29, 87, 88, 115, 189–214, 215, 226, 228, 238, 247–55
Medusa 21, 90 n. 15, 115, 123, 130, 131
memory 95–6, 96–8, 99–103
messenger 144, 146, 149–50, 152–5, 157 n. 55
  -speech 60, 64–6, 68–9, 71 nn. 6/10, 72 nn. 26/30/34
metamorphosis 14, 16, 30, 43 n. 10, 63, 119, 121, 129, 130–2, 136–7, 139 n. 12
Methodists (medical sect)180
metus ('fear/dread') *see* fear
miasma, μίασμα (moral or physical 'pollution', 'stain') 18, 81, 104–6, 169
mouse/mice 181, 225, 227

milk 14, 15, 226
  see also bodily fluid(s)
mimesis 14
Mithridates VI Eupator 220
monkeys 14, 183–5
monster, monstrum 6, 20–1, 27, 42 n. 6, 44 n. 22, 47, 54, 93, 104–8, 116, 154, 175
  hopeful 21
  monstrosity 47
  monstrous birth 208 n. 31
Moreau, Dr 175
murder, murdering, murderous 7, 18, 21, 34, 48, 59, 61, 63, 64, 67, 69, 71 n. 5, 93, 94, 97, 99, 101, 103, 104–7, 112 n. 63, 123, 130, 134, 144, 149, 150, 154, 157, 161–74 *passim*, 175, 179, 223
  juridical 100–1
  premeditated 163, 164, 165, 166
  see also androphonos, ἀνδροφόνος ('man-killing', 'man-killer'), *apokteinō,* homicide, *aposphattō* ('I cut the throat of'), *phonos* ('killing', 'slaughter'), infanticide, matricide, slaughter, *sphageus* ('cutthroat', 'butcher')
musagma, μύσαγμα ('filth') 227–8
mutilation 1, 5, 16, 30, 54, 60, 64, 116, 133, 141 n. 52, 161, 162, 169, 170, 172, 177, 200, 239
  see also torture
Myrrha 124, 133, 135

narrator 51, 53, 119, 124, 129, 148, 152, 248, 249, 251, 252
nefas 30, 46 n. 39, 95, 101, 105, 135, 136, 143, 149, 154
nightmare(s) 42 n. 6, 46 n. 40, 94, 190
nouitas 131–2
novel, Greek 176, 183
Numa Pompilius 166
numbness 19, 191, 193–4, 200, 203, 207 n. 14/15, 211 n. 71

Odysseus 47–56, 161–2, 163, 171
Odyssey see Homer
Oedipus 5, 63, 81, 144, 155
  see also Sophocles
oneiropompoi, ὀνειροπομποί ('dream-senders') *see* magic(al)
Orpheus 4, 14, 124
Ovid 119, 129–42
  Metamorphoses 14, 16–17, 29–31, 43 nn.11/12, 123–4, 129–42, 162, 172 n. 5

Pachrates, Παχράτης 216, 218–19, 220–3, 225–7, 230, 238–9
Palladion 164, 173 n. 12
Pamphilus (medical compiler) 228, 243 n. 56
Pancrates, Παγκράτης 221
paratext 253
paredros, πάρεδρος ('attendant') 217
paroistrēsin, παροίστρησις ('stinging frenzy') 223
parricidium, *parricida* ('kin-killing') 103–7, 166
passion 3, 12, 89, 125, 194
  see also emotion(s), *pathos*
passive voice 99–100
pathos / *pathos* / πάθος ('suffering') 12, 60, 61, 64, 70, 71 n. 10, 74 n. 52, 97–8, 106
pathology 19, 20, 255
pathopoia / παθοποιά ('disease-makers') 229
pavor ('trembling/shaking, fear/fright') *see* fear
penetrale regni (the inner sanctum of the realm) 145–6, 149–51, 153, 156
Pergamon/Pergamum 183, 185, 229
Persephone 4, 242 n. 17
Perseus 132
Petit, Caroline 197, 209 n. 40
Petronius 15, 40, 115, 117–19, 121–2, 125 n. 3, 126 nn. 12/25, 127 nn. 39/41
phantasia 3
phantastic 105, 107
pharmaka see magic(al)
Pharmakeutriai, Φαρμακεύτριαι (Theocritus' *Idyll* 2 '*The Sorceresses*') 241 n. 15
Philomela 133, 135, 136
philtra, φίλτρα ('love charms') *see* magic(al)
philtrokatadesmoi, φιλτροκατάδεσμοι ('love-bindings') *see* magic(al)
Phlegon of Tralleis 208 n. 31
phonos, φόνος ('killing', 'slaughter') 164, 169, 171, 173 n. 19
  see also murder, blood
phobos see fear
Phreatto 164
phrikē, φρίκη ('shuddering') 5, 207 n. 10, 217, 241 n. 14
  see also entromos, ἔντρομος ('state of trembling')
phylaktēria, φυλακτήρια ('phylacteries') *see* magic(al)
pigs 55, 180–1, 184, 221, 223
Pindar 184
pity and fear 12, 60–1, 69–70, 75–6, 89–90, 97
  see also pity, fear
plague 8–9, 81, 144, 189, 206 n. 3
plant(s) 14, 16, 22, 29–31, 130–1, 136, 146, 204, 226
  see also flora
Plato 9, 12, 76, 89, 189, 228, 230, 239
  Gorgias 207 n. 12
  Ion 76
  Laws 207 n. 10
  Republic 9
  Symposium 189, 206 n. 1
  on tragedy 89, 90 n. 10

pleasure 9, 21, 26, 39, 59–60, 69–70, 74 n. 60, 75, 90 n. 4, 138
Pliny, the Elder 181
Plutarch
    Artaxerxes 6
    Crassus 7
    Fr. 178 *On the Soul* 7
pneuma, πνεῦμα (breath) 223
poena cullei 105
poison 60, 63, 64, 165–6, 71 n. 19, 81, 83, 107, 165–6, 171, 173 n. 19, 174 n. 40, 220, 228, 255
politics 89, 94
Polyphemus 47–9, 52, 54–5, 161–2, 172 n. 2
portent 10, 105
posima, πόσιμα (‘potions’) *see* magic(al)
potēria, ποτήρια (‘potions’) *see* magic(al)
Procne 134, 151, 156
progymnasmata (‘rhetorical exercises’) 167, 171
proscriptions 94, 100, 102–3, 109 nn. 4/8
prosecution 97, 102, 163, 165, 167, 169, 170–1, 173 n. 19
Prytaneion 164
Psycho (film by A. Hitchcock) 116
psychoanalysis 21, 21 n.18, 42 n. 6, 96, 127 n. 42, 156 n. 29
psychology 94–6
PTSD (post-traumatic Stress Disorder) 94–5, 193, 203, 212 n. 73
Punic Wars 102
punishment 48–50, 55, 103, 105, 163, 164, 166, 172
putrefaction 15, 95, 115, 177
    see also body, decay
Pyramus 133, 136–7

queer 5, 23 n. 18
Quintilianus, M. Fabius 97, 104
Quintus, Roman doctor 182–3, 185

rape 4, 16, 133, 135–6, 138
reappraisal 99, 103, 106, 110 n. 33
recipes 20, 215–16, 216–18, 230–1, 238–9, 240 nn. 3/5
    definition 240 n. 6
    replication 231–3
Radcliffe, Ann 31–5, 44 nn. 16/17/18
replication, experimental 216, 231, 239
Roman identity 103–4
Romanticism 20, 253
    fiction and medicine in 253, 254
    ‘metapothecary’ 252
    monstrosity 254
    Romantic medicine
        anatomy 247, 249, 250, 251, 253, 255
        dissection 249, 250, 251
        medical report 253
        paratext 253
    ‘Scientific Gothic’ *see* Gothic 253
Rome 18, 78, 93–113, 166, 176, 180, 182
Rooms of Horrors / Errors *see* horror
Roscius, S. jun. 93, 96, 101, 104, 107
Roscius, S. sen. 96, 99–100

sacrilege 95, 101, 104, 227
Scaevola Pontifex, Q. Mucius 101
Scalae Gemoniae 176
Scarab 227
scripts 1, 2, 4, 5, 23 n. 10, 27, 45–6 n. 36
Second Sophistic 219
Selene 219, 222–7, 238, 242 n. 17, 243 n. 41, 244 n. 75
Seneca, the younger 179, 200, 210 n. 51, 211 n. 72
    Medea 123
    Thyestes 13, 36–7, 45 n. 29/31, 143–59, 162, 172 n. 4
sex 4–5, 115–19, 126 n. 21, 193
    sexual fluids 215, 226, 228–9, 238
sexuality 4–5
Shelley, Mary
    Frankenstein 116, 193, 254
Shining, The (film) 59, 70 n. 1
Sissa, G. 14
slasher movie 103
slaughter 7, 8, 13, 16, 61–3, 65–6, 68, 98–9, 102, 163, 164, 169, 170, 238
Smyrna 180, 183
smyrna, σμύρνα (myrrh) 216, 225, 226, 230, 231, 232, 234, 236–7, 244 nn. 75/77
Soderbergh, Steven 201
Sophocles
    Ajax 60, 63, 68, 72 n. 24, 73 n. 46, 74 n. 50
    Oedipus at Colonus 81
    Oedipus Tyrannus 72 n. 21, 81, 84
    Philoctetes 82–3, 91 n. 17
        visual representations of 63, 68, 72 n. 24, 73 n. 46, 84
    Trachinian Women 63–4, 81–3
    human individual as the locus of the tragic 63–4, 68, 71 n. 15, 72 n. 28, 73 nn. 46/47, 88–9
    interest in medicine 87–8
    military experience 88
    sweet and harmonious? 84
        Aristophanes on 84
        Goethe on 84
    visualization 82, 88
Sorcerer’s Apprentice, The (Disney animated film) 221
sorcery *see* magic(al)
sparagmos 14, 15, 55, 65, 72 n. 33, 162
speaking, faculty of 49, 54
spectatorship 98–103
sperm 14
    see also bodily fluid(s)
sphageus, σφαγεύς (‘cutthroat’, ‘butcher’) 164

Statius 36–7, 39–40, 45 nn. 30/35, 46 n. 37, 127 n. 43
Stoic 144, 158 n. 60, 194, 204
stuprum (rape) 136
  see also rape
Styx 147–8, 157
sublime 8–9, 32, 37, 78, 117, 126 n. 16, 132, 135
  see also p.s.-Longinus
suicide 59, 63, 65, 68–9, 74 n. 50, 81, 133, 205, 247
suitors *see* Homer, *Odyssey*
Sulla, L. Cornelius 93–4, 96, 99–100, 102
surgery 175, 177–8, 192, 200
symbol 5, 14, 15, 49, 54, 64, 93, 101, 124, 129, 130, 147, 224, 227, 244 n. 75, 249, 250, 251, 255
sympathetic causation 223, 225

Tantalus 143, 146–8, 150–1, 154, 156–9
teknophagy 13, 143
Telemachus 163
teletai, τελεταί (‘rites’) *see* magic(al)
Telyphron 176–7, 181, 183
Tereus 133, 136
terror *see* fear
thambos (‘fright, bewilderment’) 207 n. 10
tharsos (‘courage, audacity’) 211 n. 71
theatre 11, 59, 60, 67–70, 106–7, 103, 107, 190, 220
theory 13, 28, 31, 33–5, 37–41, 42 n. 2, 44 n. 21, 45 n. 32, 46 n. 40
Thisbe 133, 137
Thucydides 8–9, 189, 208 n. 31
thumokatokha, θυμοκάτοχα (procedures for restraining someone’s anger) *see* magic(al)
Thyestes 36–7, 143, 146, 149, 151–4, 156–8, 162, 172 n. 4
timor see fear
tomb 65, 67
  see also grave
tools, medical *see* medicine
torture 6–7, 115, 118–19, 121–4, 169, 176, 179, 223–4
  see also mutilation
tragedy 7, 10–12, 59–92
  ancient pictorial representations of 84
  emotions of: astonishment 75
    horror 77–90
    pity and fear 59–61, 67–70, 75–6, 89–90
  Greek 59–92, 161, 162, 164, 167, 172, 172 nn. 4/7
  tragic horror *see* horror
trauma 93–114, 117
  collective 96
  communication about 93–6
  symptoms of 95
  see also emotion
trial 93, 98–9, 100–1, 103–5, 164, 165–6, 171, 173 n. 19
tribas (as ancient figure of non-normative femininity and sexuality) 117, 126 n. 21, 126 n. 22
tribunal 98, 99, 102
Twelve Tables 166
tyrannicide 168, 169

uerba sordida (abject, disgraceful words) 132–3, 136–7, 139 n. 25
underworld 37, 49, 130, 143–5, 146–9, 155, 157
  Hades 4
unreality 102–3
unspeakable 94–5, 101
utilitas (‘usefulness’, ‘utility’) 130, 138

vegetation 14, 146
  see also flora, plant(s)
vibrant object 143, 145, 148, 150, 152, 157 n. 48
violence 1, 11, 14–18, 48, 52–6, 59, 64–5, 66, 68–9, 70 n. 1/3/4, 71 nn. 6/16, 72 nn. 32/33, 93–4, 97, 99–103, 115–27, 132–8, 161, 162, 165, 175–6, 203–6, 216, 220, 224, 226, 232, 239
Virgil 124, 129–31, 136–8, 158 n. 70
  Aeneid 134, 142 n. 72
viscera 175, 179, 182, 198, 200
  see also guts, innards
vivisection 196
  of humans 175, 179–80
  of animals 175, 180–5

Weil, Simone 52, 56
witches 17, 46 n. 42, 115, 121–3, 125, 127 nn. 38/39, 176–7, 182, 240 n. 4
  see also Erictho, magic(al)
witchcraft 115, 117, 121–3, 125, 127 nn. 38/39, 215
witness-ship 93–5, 99, 101–2, 106
wonder 7, 9, 16, 17, 35, 70, 75, 98, 105, 137, 181, 187 n. 43, 230
  see also amazement

Xenocrates of Aphrodisias (doctor) 228–9, 238, 243 n. 56
Xenophon of Athens 208 n. 31
Xenophon of Ephesus
  Ephesian Tale 2.6 185 n. 12